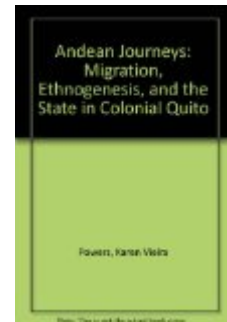


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Karen Vieira Powers. *Andean Journeys: Migration, Ethnogenesis and the State In Colonial Quito*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995. xii + 236 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8263-1600-4.

Reviewed by Marc Becker (University of Kansas)
Published on H-LatAm (September, 1995)



In a 1985 survey of North American writings on Latin American history, David Bushnell counted only one historical book on Ecuador. In comparing the number of historical studies on Ecuador to its size, Bushnell noted that it “would again lose half its territory, this time by reason of North American neglect rather than war or diplomacy.”[1] Over the past ten years however, this situation has begun to change significantly, particularly with the publishing of a number of important works on colonial Ecuadorian history. In *The People of Quito, 1690-1810: Change and Unrest in the Underclass*, Martin Minchom presents a social history of colonial Quito with a focus on the lower strata of society. In a slightly older monograph, *Native Society and Disease in Colonial Ecuador*, Suzanne Austin Alchon examines the impact which Spanish diseases had on the social structure of Indigenous peoples in the Audiencia of Quito. Two other books which will soon be published examine demographic (Linda Newson, *Life and Death in Early Colonial Ecuador*) and economic (Kenneth Andrien, *The Kingdom of Quito, 1690-1830*) history. The historiography has grown significantly since Bushnell’s essay ten years ago when John Leddy Phelan’s 1967 study *The Kingdom of Quito in the Seventeenth Century* was the only book-length historical work available to English-language readers.

Andean Journeys: Migration, Ethnogenesis, and the State in Colonial Quito, which is a revision of Karen Powers’ doctoral dissertation, is an important contribution both to the social history of colonial Ecuador as well as to Latin American demographic history in general. In this study of population movements in the Audiencia of Quito from 1534 to 1700, Powers utilizes migration as a tool to understand socioeconomic and political changes in Indigenous societies with a goal to present “a clearer

understanding of the interior meanings of indigenous life and to produce rich studies of Andean ethnogenesis” (7). She presents the intriguing question “that if migration could skew downward the population statistics presented in tribute records, then, under varying circumstances, it could also skew them upward” (8). This is an example of the innovative approaches which she brings to the study. She draws a complex picture of population shifts which includes not only dispersal patterns to marginal areas away from Spanish control, but also a demographic reconcentration in Spanish zones as well as intra-sierran exchanges in what she calls a “musical chairs” pattern of migratory movements (39).

The significance of this book, however, goes far beyond the presentation of innovative research methodologies for demographic history. Repeatedly throughout the book, Powers points to the importance of human agency. “From migration and forasterismo,” Powers notes, “the indigenous peoples of Quito formulated a survival strategy that initially destabilized the Spanish administration and then evolved into a pervasive agent of change” (169). She examines how vagabonds (also called vagamundos and forasteros) remained hidden from census takers and thus became “a vital force in destabilizing Spanish plans for demographic accountability” (85). Key to her study of such Andean survival strategies is that these responses were not static, but rather ones of continually changing individual and collective actions. Through these actions, Indigenous peoples kept alive dreams of political, social, and economic autonomy.

This book is a major step beyond the “resistance studies” common in the 1970s, and perhaps could be viewed as a mature version of the “everyday forms of resistance”

type of studies which James Scott pioneered. Powers focuses on the actions of commoners rather than elites (and often the actions of commoners *against* Indigenous elites) in forming Andean society. She notes how Indigenous migrations could both undermine and empower both encomenderos and other local elites as well as the Spanish crown. The Indians were not passive victims, but exercised an active role in the process of state formation throughout the colonial period.

This book is rooted in archival research in Ecuador as well as in Seville. Powers utilizes a wide range of secondary literature, including her dissertation advisor Nicolas Sanchez-Albornoz' classic works on Latin American demographic history and Ann Wightman's recent award-winning book *Indigenous Migration and Social Change: The Forasteros of Cuzco*. She particularly draws on works from the better-studied southern Andes, while also stressing the uniqueness of the Ecuadorian case. I suspect that those scholars will want to reinterpret their research in light of Powers' insights into Andean institutions and the significance of short-range migrations. This may be one of the first times that a book on Ecuador influences the rest of Andean historical studies.

Powers also engages recent works on colonial Ecuadorian history, most significantly Alchon's *Native Society and Disease in Colonial Ecuador*. Powers notes the limitations of colonial archival records in Ecuador, and through a linking of qualitative data to a quantitative record concludes that Alchon and others have misinterpreted a seventeenth-century population growth among Indigenous peoples. Rather than an actual population growth, this perceived change is due to migrations and tighter colonial administrative control of native populations. She calls for demographic historians to place their problems in a broader historical context as well as to use complementary sources and methods to strengthen their analyses (170).

Powers considers herself an ethnohistorian and this work focuses almost exclusively on Ecuador's Indigenous population. Although she does mention pre-Inka populations in the Ecuadorian highlands and the effects of the Inka conquest on Ecuador, her study is defined in terms of a traditional colonial history in that it begins in 1534.

As Powers makes clear, migration and population displacement happened during the period of Inka rule as well as during the Spanish colonial administration. It would be instructive to have her careful demographic analysis extended back into the pre-Spanish period. In the traditional political historiography, 1534 is considered a watershed year. How significant was this change in imperial administration, however, for the Indigenous masses which Powers studies? In order to authoritatively determine changes in migratory patterns and broader social patterns and habits, such a study would have to be projected backwards in time rather than forward into the late colonial period. There was a time when such questions concerning pre-Hispanic Indigenous cultures were the exclusive domain of archaeologists, but historians such as Powers have much to add to these inquiries.

"Using the study of migration as a vehicle," *Andean Journeys* concludes, "this book has attempted to give a more nuanced historical meaning to the actions of Ecuador's ethnic peoples" (174). In this, Powers excels mightily. *Andean Journeys* is well-written, engaging, and relatively easy to read. This book will have broader appeal than to just specialists in Andean colonial history. This is an important study for anyone interested in Indigenous struggles for survival in Latin America regardless of the time frame. Its broad and competent treatment of Andean society, migration, demographic history, and state formation would make it a natural choice for course adoption for a graduate seminar. Unfortunately, New Mexico has issued this volume only in hard cover which almost by definition makes it prohibitively expensive for such use. Nevertheless, it is an important contribution which adds significantly to our understanding of colonial Ecuador and Latin American demographic history in general.

Notes

1. David Bushnell, "South America," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 65:4 (November 1985): 772.

Copyright (c) 1995 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This review may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given the author and the list. For other permission, please contact reviews@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-latam>

Citation: Marc Becker. Review of Powers, Karen Vieira, *Andean Journeys: Migration, Ethnogenesis and the State In Colonial Quito*. H-LatAm, H-Net Reviews. September, 1995.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=151>

Copyright © 1995 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.