

Incas with a Few Drops of Aryan Blood

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On Whiteness and Power in the Andes

In the first instance I reference whiteness as it is invoked by critical race and postcolonial theorists like Lipsitz (1998) and Chakrabarty (2000). In such theoretical work whiteness is essentially a representation of power, prestige, and privilege ideologically associated with a particular narrative of world history. I thus invoke whiteness as more than merely a racial category. More fundamentally, I see it as related to a particular structure of power which is peculiarly Eurocentric and yet also disguises itself by representing Europe as not peculiar at all but instead as universal, as the norm against which the difference is measured. In doing so Europe, in significant part through its claim to whiteness, makes an implicit, when not explicit, claim to the right to rule over others who are not or less European, not or less white. In other words, historically one of the keys to the power of whiteness is the role it plays in constituting Europe (or in postcolonial contexts European segments of non-European countries) as the universal standard. As an assumed and structurally imposed norm, whiteness is thus also an unmarked category. White is that which refuses to recognize itself as Other, rejecting the possibility of being different while constantly representing itself as that against which difference must be measured. Whiteness as a construct thus constitutes non-Europeans or non-whites as marked categories, slotting such Others into categories of “difference” to be measured against an implicit, or sometimes explicit, white norm. This dimension is central in some measure to whiteness most everywhere it is found. ⁱ

However, this paper is about whiteness in the Andean region and in particular about a long-standing discourse on the whiteness of the Inca. As such it presents not only an exceptional understanding on discourses of power and whiteness but also ultimately provides us the chance to retell world history in a fundamentally different way: a peculiarly universalist Andean way that simultaneously borrows from the logic of Eurocentric whiteness and radically challenges it. Historically, various ideologues and national leaders from the core Andean states (I focus primarily on Peru and Bolivia here) have struggled to assert equivalence between whiteness and Incanness or, more broadly, Europeanness and Andeanness. In part, this struggle represents a long-term intellectual project to explicitly compare Andean civilizations (mostly the Inca but also the ancient Aymara) with those presumed to be European: i.e. precisely those cultural and political feats presumed to make Europe the model for what constitutes a civilization and a “buen gobierno” (to appropriate a phrase from Guaman Poma).

Such discourses stretch back to the earliest of colonial writings. Garcilaso de la Vega’s *Comentarios Reales de los Incas* explicitly compared Inca society to Rome, one of the key mythical sources of Europe’s claim to civilization, and set a precedent that South American ideologues continually drew on when trying to define the importance of Peruvian identity in both national and global context. So too Guaman Poma’s “Nueva Cronica y Buen Gobierno” written at the outset of the sixteenth century indexes this logic of “comparative politics” in its very title. Written out of a desire to reveal the problems with Spanish colonialism Guaman Poma’s argument rested in part on the idea that the Inca had a thing or two to teach Europeans about the nature of “good government” over a population. In fact, discourses about Inca sovereignty – and hence the right to rule – continued to appear as a matter of debate between both Andean ideologues and later *criollo* independence movement leaders. This is clear in the Tupac Amaru

II rebellion of the 1780s when *criollos* and Spaniards allied to suppress the use of Inca discourses to challenge Spain's sovereignty (notably by banning Garcilaso de la Vega's *Comentarios Reales*). Just a few decades later – and with more than a bit of irony - several *criollo* leaders sought to appropriate Inca imagery for the independence cause. They did so to ground their claim to a sovereign American soil in an autochthonous civilization, serving not only to symbolically legitimate Inca sovereignty and cultural achievement but also specifically to make illegitimate Spanish rule.

Inca Whiteness in the 19th and at the Turn of the 20th

For the purposes of this paper I hope to demonstrate how this discourse of the Inca's cultural and political legitimacy transformed during the heyday of nation-state formation and racial science. The on-going discourse about the rightful sovereignty and cultural achievements of the Inca was eventually conflated with the emerging discourse on white supremacy which took full shape during the heyday of race science in the 19th century and beginning of the 20th. Various intellectuals from different South American countries sought to explicitly whiten the Inca, or other pre-Inca civilizations, by arguing that ancient Andeans were a product of the global expansion of an ancient Aryan race. Such arguments were often rooted in linguistic comparisons between Quechua, Sanskrit and Greek. Thus, writers like the Uruguayan philologist Vicente López (1871) argued that the Inca were in fact a product of an early Aryan expansion into the New World – presumably having crossed the Pacific after expanding into parts of Asia.

Such debates about the greatness of Andean civilization effectively bridged the culture versus race and religion versus science divides as they became entrenched in the 19th century.

Hence, a Peruvian writer like Clemente Palma, the son of the influential intellectual Ricardo Palma, could take the logical next step. He assumed that the Inca were white not only on cultural and linguistic grounds but also on biological grounds. In his infamous bachelor's thesis, written at the turn of the twentieth century, his scathing pessimism about Peru's racial predicament was offset by an inherent racial optimism. In the middle of a long diatribe against the various Indian, black, Chinese, and mixed races that explained Peru's racially determined hopelessness he made room for an important exception. Since the Inca lineage and thus the Inca state was founded by Manco Capac, a legendary leader from a legendary foreign land, he argued that the Inca were in fact racially white. The Inca in other words were not really Indian in origin, even if their lines had become crossed with the multitude of Indians over which they ruled. As Palma puts it:

It wasn't those old, miserable, Indians that created that relatively prosperous Empire; it was the spirit of a mysterious man, of a wise legislator, *who perhaps had a few drops of Aryan blood*, who was perhaps a stranger, who perhaps emerged out of that same disgraced [Indian] race like an exotic flower, like one of those unexplainable anomalies of nature that allow an intellectual to be born among a generation of idiots and an idiot among a generation of intellectuals. That's how since the ninth century, according to some, and since the eleventh century, according to others, Manco Capac appeared and until the beginnings of the sixteenth century with the Conquest there was a period of well-defined living, of organized living, of nationality among the Indian race due to the rising spirit of a civilizing lineage. (Palma, 1897:13, my emphasis)

Even full-blooded members of the "Aryan" race living in Europe or the US at the time were occasionally in dialogue with these ideas about the Inca whiteness. Notably such debates arose during the same era in which both racial criteria and cultural-historical-linguistic criteria

were fused to justify the logic of white, Aryan supremacy. One thinks not just of the founders of physical anthropology like Samuel Morton and Paul Broca but also those intellectuals whose ideas were rooted in arguments about civilization and language like Gobineau and Max Muller.

Noticeably, Vicente Lopez' book *Les Races Aryennes du Perou* was written in French rather than Spanish. And he published it in Paris rather than Montevideo very explicitly to seek a scientific - white European - audience. Indeed, he says very explicitly in the Preface (ironically the *only* part of the book written in Spanish) that French is a "language of science" – implying of course that Spanish is not. In the Preface he also acknowledges the intellectual and logistical support of Gaston Maspero, who was not coincidentally a leading French Egyptologist at the time. This was not a coincidence for two reasons. The incipient field of Egyptology was engaged in a very similar argument about the ancient Egyptians as the product of an invading Aryan race from the North – to be contrasted from the African hordes whose origin was presumed to be south of the Nile region. The evidence for such arguments was thus also rooted in the emerging science of archaeology which at the time, more or less as a matter of course, took large scale monuments as a sign of the global spread of Aryan civilization. Similar arguments were also eventually applied to archaeological sites like Tiwanaku, for example by Pedro Ignacio Cisneros (1909), a provincial Peruvian judge and amateur historian who palled around with Antonio Raimondi.

In a parenthetical remark found in his famous critique of early race science Stephen Jay Gould (1981:64) notes how the nineteenth century Philadelphia physician and founder of craniometry, Samuel Morton, was baffled by one particular detail in his race data. It had to do with an apparent anomaly in his measurements of Inca heads. Morton is now infamous for his contrived methodology to measure cranial capacity and thus "prove" the existence of superior

and inferior races – and by implication cultures - based on (false) assumptions about the relation between intelligence and cranial size. What he found when he measured Inca heads was that ancient Peruvian crania were actually very small: like, seriously, way too small. Not only was the Peruvian average smaller than the averages for Europeans, which he no doubt expected, and Asians, who he had less concerns about. It was also smaller than the average for “negro” skulls. Morton ultimately hoped to prove that negro skulls were at the very bottom of his list since his argument about white superiority was little more than a justification for the continuation of enslavement in the Americas. Furthermore, Morton found that the Inca average was the smallest of all crania in his collection from Native American groups, including many who were by his standard clearly still in a savage state compared to the highly civilized Inca. It simply made no sense. How was it that an advanced Andean civilization - which in his more ethnological moments Morton appreciated as comparable to ancient Greece or Egypt – could have been run by humans with such small heads? This was a question for which Morton had no answer and flatly contradicted his entire hypothesis about the ostensibly causal relation between race, intelligence and degree of civilization.

In fact it made so little sense that other European intellectuals interpreting Morton’s studies simply misinterpreted his data on the Inca. Citing and then completely misreading Morton’s results the eminent British historian William Prescott published this remark in his widely read *History of the Conquest of Peru* in 1847:

It was the Inca nobility, indeed, who constituted the real strength of the Peruvian monarchy. Attached to their prince by ties of consanguinity, they had common sympathies and, to a considerable extent, common interests with him. Distinguished by a peculiar dress and insignia, as well as by language and blood, from the rest of the community, they

were never confounded with the other tribes and nations who were incorporated into the great Peruvian monarchy. After the lapse of centuries, they still retained their individuality as a peculiar people. They were to the conquered races of the country what the Romans were to the barbarous hordes of the Empire, or the Normans to the ancient inhabitants of the British Isles...They possessed, moreover, an intellectual preeminence, which, no less than their station, gave them authority with the people. Indeed, it may be said to have been the principal foundation of their authority. The crania of the Inca race show a decided superiority over the other races of the land in intellectual power; and it cannot be denied that it was the fountain of that peculiar civilization and social polity, which raised the Peruvian monarchy above every other state in South America. (Prescott 1847:38–39)

Other, lesser known Andean intellectuals, like the Bolivian Emeterio Villamil de Rada (1939) took this idea of an emerging world history and white civilization centered in the Andean region to entirely new levels. Pitting his Bolivian nationalism against Peru's claim to being the keeper of the "highest" of Andean civilizations, Villamil de Rada wove together a complexly Judeo-Christian and scientific argument to critique Vicente López' classic work on Quechua as an offshoot of Indo-European (thus Aryan) languages. Villamil de Rada suggests that Aymara (spoken primarily in Bolivia) is the Andean language that should be analyzed because, he argued, it is much older than Quechua. He goes considerably further to suggest that Vicente Lopez has the arrows of world history pointing in exactly the wrong direction. The point is not that ancient Andeans are the descendents of an invading and civilizing Aryan race before the "official" onset of post-Colombian colonization. Rather, according to Villamil de Rada, it is the ancient Aymara who are the world's original inhabitants. As such they are the original creators

of *all* of the world's languages and – since language is at the root of all culture he argues – *all* the world's original standards of civilization. They undoubtedly gave birth to the eventual greatness of the Inca. But, more importantly, he argues that the Aymara gave birth to all great civilizations of the world - including those in Europe, Asia, and northern Africa that Europeans (wrongly) presume to be the product of Aryan invasions. In short the Old World did not discover the New World. Rather, the arrows of world history point in the opposite direction and hence the title of his work, *La Lengua de Adan y el Hombre de Tiaguanaco*. The language of Adam was Aymara; the original site of civilization the southern Andes.

A Few Concluding Thoughts on Race, Rule, and Off-Centered Andean States

So, what relevance does this discussion about the debates over the whiteness of the Inca – or if we think more radically still like Villamil de Rada the Incanness of whites – have to do with the idea of Andean countries as “off-centered” states? A few concluding thoughts on race, rule, centeredness in this context.

Race: First, this discourse over Inca whiteness troubles the imagined racial dichotomies between Indian and white we have grown accustomed to in Latin America considerably – and it does so in a way quite distinct from the historical discourses of *mestizaje*. The *mestizo* figures in the racial imaginary as part of a discourse linking Latin American cultural decline with its ostensible racial degradation or, alternately, as one that sees the *mestizo* as a symbol of Latin America's cultural uniqueness and ostensible racial superior (via Vasconcelos). Yet, in both the negative and positive cases the final emphasis is on racial and cultural mixture. The Inca's whiteness on the other hand suggests that certain kinds of Indians, aristocratic Indians culturally and politically “capable” of claiming a legitimate right to rule (i.e. erecting an imperial state),

might in fact be explained as simply being white. And although much of the debate revolved around ostensible connections between Aryan and Inca culture, these thinkers also veered into the language of racial biology as it was understood at the time to prove the Inca's whiteness: hence relying on the 19th century language and logics of Euro-American race science.

Rule: The fact that it is Indians culturally “capable” of building a state at the center of the debate over Inca whiteness makes the connection between race and rule quite clear. The 19th century was also the formative era for the emerging modern nation-state and the second wave of European imperialism: thus prolific debates about who has the right to rule over others. Racial discourses, as products of Europe's first and second waves of imperialism, were explicitly tied to this question of rule everywhere: as a justification for colonization and slavery for sure but also as a means of justifying the whiteness of the state as a ruling apparatus be it colonial or independent. If the idea of the Inca – as ancient constructors of a state and thus rightful bearers of the right to rule over others – was factored into criollo independence movements (as Rebecca Nathan suggests) and continually reappears in Andean national history (as Alberto Flores Galindo suggests) then the logic is clear. If the Inca had the right to rule then clearly they must have been white since, according to the influential ideology of white supremacy as it was being proffered at the time, white makes right. Jumping ahead a century or so, one can't help but remark on the fact that both Alejandro Toledo and Evo Morales wrote themselves into national history as “white Incas” of a sort and with all the archaeological grandeur necessary: the former with an inauguration ceremony at Macchu Picchu; the latter with one at Tiwanaku.

Off-centered States: Finally, I would suggest that the existence of white Incas troubles at least one of the connotations associated with the central idea of the conference: i.e. that Andean states are in fact off-center. In fact, white Incas suggest the exact opposite: that Andean states

have been historically imagined (and thus can still imagine themselves) as centers, or more provocatively still, *the* center. Rather than imagining themselves exclusively as part of Europe's periphery those thinkers invested in the debate over Inca whiteness actively imagined the Andes as part of Europe's claim to being at the center of world history: thinkers who were not only from South America but also from Europe and the US. In fact, the more radical among them – those with a mind like Villamil de Rada's – sought to push the logic even further: to tell a history of the world in which the unmarked category of cultural achievement and the invisible standards of world history by which the right to rule is granted reside in the Andes. In short, a world in which the Inca rightfully colonized Europe rather than the reverse. And this of course allows for a world in which it is Europe, not the Andes, that is a bit off-center.

ⁱ There are some important exceptions to such an understanding of whiteness which would question its automatic association to power and privilege. These are made obvious by the long-standing discourses on rural whites (i.e. “white trash”) or ethnic/immigrant whites (for example, the Irish and Italians in the US). And such exceptions result in wonderfully creative book titles like Jim Goad's *Redneck Manifesto*. However, given the fact that I am dealing with the Andean region and there are no discourses of “white ethnics” or “white trash” to speak of I will refrain from elaborating on this point.