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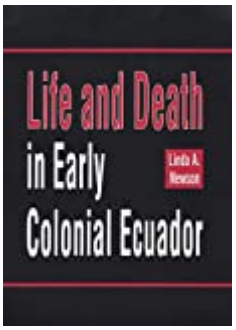

Linda A. Newson. *Life and Death in Early Colonial Ecuador.* Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995. xii + 505 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8061-2697-5.

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This ambiguously titled book is not a history of the society and customs of "Spanish" Ecuador. Rather, it is a study of the demographic decline which resulted when the aboriginal population of Ecuador was overwhelmed by conquest and disease. Newson begins her study at or just before the point when the Ecuadorian sierra began to be incorporated into the Inka Empire (ca. 1460). She describes in great detail what can be inferred about the preconquest population of Ecuador's three major regions: sierra, coast and Oriente. She then describes the disastrous impact of Inka penetration and partial conquest of Ecuador, and of the prolonged wars still being fought there when Spanish brought Ecuador's first colonial period to an abrupt end and began a new series of invasions which subdued and "reduced" the indigenous population over a number of years.

Before the period of invasion and conquest, the ethnic groups Newson studies were at least holding their own, and some were thriving, developing more complex forms of socio-political organizations and expanding commercial contacts. The sierra, the most populous and highly developed of the three regions, was home to approximately 836,000 (pp. 59-60) of a total pre-conquest population of approximately 1,150,000 (pp. 78, 114). Groups in the southern sierra region were the first to confront and succumb to Inka imperialism. Where the Inkas succeeded in establishing control, often against stiff resistance and after substantial casualties suffered by both sides, local populations were forced to accept significant modifications of political and economic structures and to meet Inka demands for labor on a hitherto unprecedented scale. Well before any recovery from these systemic shocks was possible, Old World epidemics moved into certain areas in advance of Spanish conquest and triggered further cycles of demographic disaster.

Newson studies Spanish conquest region by region, ethnic group by ethnic group, noting the density of Spanish settlement and its proximity to Indian communities, the taxation imposed, the amount of labor exacted, aod the types of labor systems used (encomienda, slavery, wage) to produce the wealth needed to sustain Spanish presence in each area. Inka conquest had familiarized some but not all Ecuadorian Indians with mita labor. The Spanish conquerors made the system their own, but increased the demand beyond any level to which the Inka might have aspired. Newson discovers that Ecuadorian Indians were among the most highly taxed in Spanish America: even where Indians were worked to their deaths in mines, in obrajes, as beasts of burden, and as ancillaries to military expeditions, they were unable to satisfy large tribute debts which remained on the books as their testimony to the senseless greed of the conquerors.

Newson's book is one of three recent books on Ecuadorian demography. Suzanne Austin Alchon (1) and Karen V. Powers (2) each focus on a single factor in demographic change (disease and migration) as they played themselves out, principally in the Ecuadorian sierra. In contrast, Newson's work arrives at estimates for the preconquest population of all of Ecuador, follows the fate of all three regions through the sixteenth century and beyond. She revises Alchon's preconquest figure for the sierra downward by 20% (p. 339). Powers's book, like Newson's, appeared in 1995. Newson did, however, consult Powers's dissertation and several of her articles.(3) While she accepts Powers's conclusion that more effective registration of fugitive Indians may have given the appearance of population recovery (p. 201), she challenges her assertion that migration to the sierra occurred on a massive scale (p. 280).

Most other general and specialized studies of Andean demography and society find their way into Newson's bibliography and footnotes. Nicolas Sanchez-Albornoz is the only scholar of note not to receive mention, but perhaps he is recognized through the more specific work of his student, Karen Powers. Newson endeavors to provide as definitive a treatment of her subject and her area as the limitations of the available data will admit. Her methodology is convincing, and, unless significant new evidence is unexpectedly uncovered, it may be a long while before any scholar will feel the need to revisit the subject. Her ultimate achievement goes much further than counting Indians: she provides a graphic and devastating picture of what conquest means for the vanquished, how it virtually destroyed every indigenous group with which it came in contact. In the end, we see the many pieces of a very large puzzle fitted into place and the panorama of demographic disaster revealed in great detail. She concludes that depopulation ranged from approximately 72-95%; and that total population declined from approximately 1,500,000 to approximately 217,000 by the end of the sixteenth century (p. 350).

The book is well-written throughout. It is unlikely, however, that it will in its totality be assigned to the average undergraduate reader, since it presumes a grounding in the history of the Inka Empire, the Spanish conquest and previous demographic studies of Ecuador, some of which are not easily accessible to readers outside the field. Here, a brief overview of bibliography might have been more useful than Newson's occasional brief comments about work already done in the field, such as her comments on p. 17, n. 44. Otherwise, Newson is extremely sensitive to the challenges her work poses and provides her readers with a good deal of help to absorb the wealth of material she presents.

The book begins with an explanation of the patterns of demographic change. Newson entices the average historian who might be reading only for the opening and closing population tallies to follow her through the very careful reasoning she uses to arrive at her regional and composite figures. Readers may not know or think they will need to remember the many ethnic groups or remote provinces she studies, but Newson prevails here as well by involving them in the process. Region by region she presents details of climate, altitude, the environment and varieties of adaptations to it, the level of agricultural sophistication, trade and social organization, religion, language, clothing and housing styles, adequacy of diet, fertility, infanticide, abortion, disease, flight, sex ratio and practices which can compensate for imbalance, in sum, the totality of economic, social and political practices which have a bearing on a group's ability and willingness to reproduce itself.

Newson points out some of the demographic ironies of colonization. She shows, for instance, how labor demands which took Indians from their communities, such as personal service in the home of an encomendero, might well have had a more devastating demographic impact than more oppressive labor in obrajes located in Indian villages because the former removed laborers needed to sustain the food supply and diminished the opportunities for sexual relations, at the same time that it increased the likelihood of racial mixing.

Newson recognizes that missionaries were generally more benevolently disposed toward the Indians they evangelized than soldiers and colonists eager to exploit Indian labor for personal gain. In her study of the Oriente, she reminds us, however, of the devastating effects which followed upon congregating Indians into areas where the food supply was less adequate, where Indians living in close quarters were more vulnerable to European diseases, where the process of conversion further weakened indigenous peoples by subjecting their culture to concentrated stress, and where religious restrictions limited the choice and availability of sexual partners and thereby served as an impediment to demographic recovery.

Newson's progress through her agenda is logical and systematic throughout. General maps and charts accompany the overview which opens the discussion, and thereafter, each area has its own intelligently composed map and statistical charts where relevant. The work

is carefully annotated, and there is an extensive bibliography. Technical concepts and unfamiliar terms in Quechua, Spanish and other languages are carefully explained when first encountered in the text, and then defined succinctly in a six-page glossary at the end of the book. The volume of information provided is such that it is not easily absorbed by the non-specialist, so Newson is careful to summarize at the end of each chapter and section.

On the down-side, there are occasional typographical errors, "culitvated" for "cultivated" (p. 136); "sleva" for "selva" (p. 350). The one major and very unfortunate flaw in the support system is the index, which provides only an approximate guide to where entries can be found after the third chapter: the pattern of errors suggests that subsequent portions of the book were re- set after the index was completed. For instance, the entry for "Murra" should read "127-128" in place of "129-130"; the entry "Labor (forced); in cordage production, 209-210" sends the reader to a discussion of Indians in textile mills. (A discussion of Indians and timbering, possibly the target of the preceding reference, is found on p. 253).

In balance, however, Newson's work is a major, pioneering contribution to the field of Andean demographic history. It provides a comprehensive, detailed and reasoned study of a region on the periphery of the Inka Empire. The compactness of the area allows for detailed attention, while the diversity of environments, ethnic groups, variations in the timing and intensity of conquest experiences, and in the data available for study give ample opportunity for the author show how scholarship and method can fill vacuums and produce rich insights into phenomena hitherto beyond our reach.

1. Suzanne Austin Alchon, *Native Society and Disease in Colonial Ecuador* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1991).

2. Karen V. Powers, *Migration, Ethnogenesis, and the State in Colonial Quito* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

3. K. M. Powers, "Indian Migration and Socio-Political Change in the Audiencia of Quito" (Ph. D. diss. New York University, 1990); "Indian Migrations in the Audiencia de Quito: Crown Manipulation and Local Cooptation," in *Migration in Colonial Spanish America*, ed. D. J. Robinson (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), 313-23; and "Migracion vertical en la Audiencia de Quito: El caso de los Quijos en el siglo XVI," in _Revista Ecuatoriana de Historia Economica, 2 (1987): 103-30.

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