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## BOOK REVIEW

### **NILS JACOBSEN, *MIRAGES OF TRANSITION. THE PERUVIAN ALTIPLANO, 1780-1930***

Daniel Zamorano

**Nils Jacobsen, *Mirages of Transition. The Peruvian Anliplano, 1780--1930*. Illustrated by the author. University of California Press, USA, 1993. 481 pages.**

A wholly accessible book, *Mirages of Transition* provides an understanding of the multifaceted changes currently occurring in Latin American agrarian societies and economies in terms of the paradigm of the transition to capitalism. The book combines economic and social analysis in the historical, cultural and institutional context of Latin America. A finely documented study based on research in rural archives and conversations with local intellectuals, it is also carefully illustrated with maps, tables, and figures and supplemented with a vast bibliography as well as a glossary of specific Spanish-Indian terms.

The study is divided into two parts: 1) Crisis and Realignment, 1780-1855, and 2) The Wool Export Cycle, 1855-1920 -- consisting of nine chapters in which the author tackles the transformation of Latin American societies and economies between the late colonial period and the Great Depression. His account of the changing nature of markets challenges the view that dependency is the factor responsible for the eternally "developing" situation in the Altiplano.

Different issues concerning trade, land, labor, and livestock raising are explored through the study of one Altiplano province, Azangaro, over a period of some one hundred and fifty years, from the 1770s to 1930. Jacobsen predicates the specific impact of its culture, environment, and historically evolved relations of power and status on postindependence Peru. He investigates the cycles and long-term transformations of a provincial agrarian economy and society in the Andean Highlands of Peru from the

crisis of the colonial order to the crisis of the export economy. While focusing on the above issues and on the shifting configuration of the social groups involved, *Mirages of Transition* seeks throughout to establish how specific constellations of power have influenced the scope and direction of socio-economic change. Its general conclusion is that the crucial factor in blocking the transition to capitalism in the Peruvian Altiplano has been the persistent legacy of colonialism.

In the context of the book, the term "legacy of colonialism" refers to the tendency of most social groups in the Altiplano -- indian peasants, hispanized landholders, traders, priests, government officials, police, and military -- to use polarized visions of society, such as those of colonizers/colonized, Spaniards/Indians, "civilized notables"/"barbaric peasants", to construct, define, and fortify not only their own power and social identity, but also patterns of trade, relations of production, the composition of social groups, and the nature of the state. As Jacobsen shows, all this occurred throughout the period of important changes which stretches between the 1780s and 1930. Although Altiplano society and economy thoroughly metamorphosized in response to both the growing demand for its raw materials on the world market and the new currents of political and social thought, the old colonial cleavages and modes of constructing power did not disappear: "they took on a new garb".

Jacobsen defines capitalism as the dominance or, more accurately, the gradual rise to dominance of three crucial conditions of organizing economic activity and social relations: 1) an internal, tendentially "price-setting" or self-regulating market which contributes to a deepening of the division of labor concurrent with the process of capital accumulation; 2) the separation from the means of production of growing numbers of producers and the establishment of wage labor in the manufacturing and service sectors (in agriculture, capitalism may take the form of large enterprises relying on rural workers); and 3) the legal recognition, effective protection and conventional acceptance of private property.

He then goes on to demonstrate that, in the Peruvian Altiplano, these processes either remained stuck in midstream -- often for half a century or longer -- or led towards outcomes that could not have been predicted within the framework of a transition to capitalism. The process of change was driven by the same forces that propelled the transition to capitalism elsewhere -- impulses from the market, the labor process, and the legal norms concerning property. However, in the Peruvian Altiplano, these forces provoked a reawakening and readjustment of an older set of social forces that constituted serious obstacles to the emergence of capitalism: monopoly, clientalism, and communal solidarity. The transition to agrarian capitalism thus remained a mirage.

As a way of explaining this state of affairs, Jacobsen points out that the timing, direction, and modalities of change in every society depend to a very large extent on a host of variables specific to that society -- from landscape and climate to cultural norms, education, infrastructure, class relations, and the distribution of power. Whence proceeds the author's portrayal of the complex pattern of continuity and change in the Peruvian Altiplano as a unique, open-ended process. Jacobsen rejects the teleological view according to which changes in a given Latin American society and economy ineluctably prepare the triumph of capitalism. In the Peruvian Altiplano, the transition to capitalism began in the decades after the Spanish conquest, with the introduction of money, the payment of wages to mine workers, and a limited trade in land. This transition continues today, with a growing number of agrarian enterprises operating on the basis of capitalist relations of production.

As Jacobsen shows, the region has been powerfully affected by capitalism, but it has not been totally remade in its image, as recurring stalemates between those of its social forces that were the consequence of colonialism led to the revitalization of older norms and modes of economic behavior, a type of defensive change. There are dynamics of inequality, some surviving from the colonial era, others newly arising in the last century, that have roots independent of the capitalist economy. These dynamics ought to be considered before assigning any particular instance of regionally or socially unequal development to the workings of capitalism. This is especially true of regions in which capitalist relations of production have not come to dominate directly even today.

Jacobsen views the economic and social developments in the Altiplano as characterized by both cycles and transformations. "Cycles" are not meant as closed circles -- like the annual pattern of production and social life in the countryside and the roughly seven-year pattern of rising and falling water levels in Lake Titicaca. They rather refer to the patterns which can be observed in the secular movements of global economic activity: periods of about seventy years of growth followed by intervals of stagnation and crisis of roughly the same length. Eras of hierarchy and monopoly in southern Peru's economy and structures of power have alternated with eras of more open, competitive, horizontal socio-economic structures. That is to say, transformation does yield new patterns of market and transportation, new currents of ideas, new channels for articulating political power, and new arenas of social conflict.

In short, the book presents an alternative description and identification of the several turning points that mark the evolution of the region's society and economy. Among those turning points: the crisis initiated by the Tupac Amaru Rebellion and the gradual realignment of the 1780s as a response to competition from European textile imports, rising transport costs and

depressed prices, etc.; the agrarian reform laws of the 1820s which consolidated the gains peasants had achieved through land occupations; the wool export trade between the 1850s and 1920 which was the motor of the economy of the Altiplano, as well as the crisis of the 1920s which marked a major change for the rural society of the northern altiplano and in the constellation of social forces. The author also shows how, from these years on, the Altiplano`s economy and society entered a long phase of stalemate that held until the agrarian reform of 1969. He delineates periods of growth, such as the recovery of silver mining in High Peru and the boom in Cuzco's wool industry, and periods of turmoil, such as the World War I era and the various struggles by which the Indians bettered their situation and brought changes to the land tenancy law.

He also shows that, while exploitation did become fiercer with the rise of an export economy, it was in large part the outcome of strongly polarized neocolonial power relations and class interests. The blockage of the full transition to capital -- intensive and highly productive agrarian structures in this province of Peru -- must be explained not only in economic terms, but also in terms of the historical constellations of power between social groups, and the type of legal and institutional framework provided by the State.

The final conclusion Jacobsen reaches is that:

only when Indian identity can be construed without the heavy burden of repression, and when business people and officials in Peru`s sierra have ceased to rely on the crutch of the neocolonial construction of power, can we hope for sustainable economic growth and a more equitable distribution of resources.

*Mirages of Transition* stems from the application of a pluridisciplinary method and results in an easy-to-read study of the processes of economic and social change. Based on the sociological, anthropological and economical study of a specific society, it reaches a new level of analysis and provides a Latin American perspective on a Latin American slice of history. It thereby constitutes an analysis that future works on the region will need to consider.

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