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Down to Earth: Race and Substance in the Andes

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Abstract — The racial identities of Indians and mestizos in a highland Peruvian region are closely associated with their relative positions to the earth. The agricultural Indians are closer to the earth and the town-dwelling mestizos are further from it. This distinction is maintained and reinforced through the use of material objects in everyday life, especially earthen objects (adobe bricks, clay pots, dirt roads) and to earth-touching objects (shoes, floors). This distinction accords with the relativity and fluidity of racial identities of individuals. The origins of this notion are traced to political and religious ideology in colonial and post-colonial Peru. © 1998 Society for Latin American Studies. Published by Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved

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INTRODUCTION

As a constitutive element of Andean societies, race seems both central and elusive. Its centrality lies in the way that the term 'race' captures key features of the enduring divisions in Peruvian, Bolivian and Ecuadorian societies: the belief that people in these societies are descended from distinct stocks, the use of this purported descent to explain the dramatic differences and inequalities in these societies. Its elusive nature lies in the fluid and situational character of these differences: the fact that individuals can shift their position in systems of racial classification, the relative nature of racial identity that permits an individual to be simultaneously more Indian than a second and more mestizo than a third. Moreover, racial divisions overlap with other contrasts — between city and countryside, between different regions of specific nations, between literacy and illiteracy, between orientations that place positive and negative valuations on physical labour. This apparent multiplicity and lack of fixity can reinforce racial domination, as Weismantel (1996) has argued. It also makes it more difficult to pin down issues of race in the Andes, at least for people accustomed to the fixed racial boundaries in North America and Europe.

Many studies of racial theories and practices have emphasised the importance of the human body and the substances that compose it. For example, the metaphor of blood can be used to express the notion that the most basic animating element of the human body can differ from group to group. Skin and hair, the external surfaces of the human body, play a crucial role in many racial theories as the immediately visible signs of racial difference. Such bodily substances can be taken to show that racial differences are inherited and inherent; passed on from parent to child by the bodily act of reproduction, they express themselves for the entire course of an individual's life.

This paper follows such inquiries by examining racial categories in the Andes through an exploration of the human body and of substances. However, the substance on which I focus

is not a biological component of the human body, but rather a substance external to it, though closely tied to it: the earth. Racial identities are often related to notions of the earth, because of the many forms of contact, assimilation and association that link human bodies and the earth. The centrality of the earth in all human societies and its particular importance in agrarian settings parallel the centrality of race in the Andes; the multiplicity of forms in which the earth in present (in the practices of daily life and in discourses about identity) and its multivocality as a symbol suggest the elusiveness of precise definitions of racial categories. Moreover, the many different degrees of proximity of human bodies to the earth parallel the many different degrees of relative Indian and mestizo identity in the Andes.

Many specific practices and discourses link human bodies, the earth, and racial identities in the Andes. In this paper, I focus on the material objects that form part of daily life, especially household goods. It is therefore important to acknowledge at the outset the existence of the other links that I treat in a more sketchy fashion. Of these, I will mention only three: agriculture, the source of food in this region; indigenous religion, in which such entities as the Earth Mother, Pachamama, and other spirits associated with hills and mountains, play a great importance; mortuary practices, including the burial of the dead in the ground. These three are connected, as others have shown in detail (Allen, 1988; Arnold *et al.*, 1992). Peasant villagers associate, to varying degrees, the fertility of the soil with certain rituals and with the spirits of the dead; for mestizo townspeople, a disdain for agricultural work is reinforced by the alien eerieness that they sense in the countryside, especially at night. I have chosen everyday material objects rather than agriculture, religion or mortuary practices as my focus because of the pervasiveness of these everyday items and the relative paucity of discussion of them in issues of identity in Andean society.

The examples that I provide of the importance of the earth in marking race are drawn from my ethnographic research in the Peruvian *altiplano*, the portions of the Lake Titicaca basin within the Peruvian department of Puno. These examples centre on two specific kinds of objects: earthen objects, objects made of earth as a material, and earth-touching objects, objects that enter into regular contact with the earth and with these earthen objects. These objects form part of the simple routines of virtually all people in the *altiplano*: cooking and eating food, putting on or taking off clothes, staying in houses or going from one place to another. These objects ordinarily fade into the background, and are simply taken for granted. When they are not used in the routine manner that marks Indians as closer to the earth and mestizos as further from the earth, the ordinariness of these objects allows them to serve as potent reminders of the force of racial identity.

It is hardly novel for anthropologists to discuss the association between Indians and the earth, or to claim that this association is present in the minds of both Indians and mestizos. Ethnographies of earlier decades (Escobar, 1967; van den Berghe and Primov, 1977; Isbell, 1978; Allen, 1988) state that Indians live in rural areas, unlike the mestizos, who are towndwellers. Indian work, the raising of crops and the herding of livestock, takes place out of doors, literally on the earth, while mestizos are employed indoors in such activities as commerce, office work and urban trades. The Indians are, after all, the native inhabitants, aboriginal or autochthonous peoples, and they are tied to the earth through their membership in particular communities; the mestizos came from far away in earlier historical times and maintain relations with mestizos in other towns and cities.

These earlier writings tend to emphasise the earth as a resource (it provides economic livelihood and marketable products) or as a symbol (it is an arbitrary element that stands for Indians). This paper, while acknowledging the first aspect, expands particularly upon the

second. It follows on the links of rural areas and agriculture with Indians. (In this sense, the shift from '*indígena*' to '*campesino*' — from Indian to peasant — is not so fully a shift from ethnic to class terms as has sometimes been understood, because the root *campo* [countryside, field] suggests a place that denotes racial identity as well as a class-based occupation.) This paper treats earth, in the sense of soil, of dirt, of mud, as a substance that is closely bound up with many aspects of Indian life, and that in some ways makes Indians the kind of people that they are. As Weismantel (1996) has shown in her discussion of another Andean region, habitually to eat certain foods and to wear certain types of clothing can be taken, not merely as reflecting or displaying Indianness, but as constituting it.

This paper also differs from earlier discussions of the relation of the earth to racial identities in the Andes because it suggests that the earth does not only serve as a basis for distinguishing between Indians and mestizos; it also indicates the connections between them. Rather than just providing a number of contrasting features (like language or dress), by which the two races can be separated, it is the terrain on which they meet. The closeness of Indians to the earth is a relative feature rather than a distinctive sign; this closeness stands out, not only in its own terms, but also in contrast with the greater relative separation of mestizos from the earth. Moreover, the earth suggests the connections between Indians and mestizos through several features: the simple continuity of the land despite the differences of Indian and mestizo spaces, the contact with the earth as the surface upon which people walk and build houses. Though this paper does not claim that the ties to the earth are the only dimension of race in the Andes, or a uniquely central dimension, it does suggest the importance of looking at other dimensions of race in the Andes through the perspective of the connection to the earth. For example, the notorious mestizo insult of *indio sucio*, dirty Indian, can be juxtaposed with the association of the earth and Indian bodies, while the obverse Indian notion of the lazy mestizo can be linked to the separation of mestizos from the earth, a major locus of work. In short, earth and race, ubiquitous elements in Andean social life, are closely related. I now turn to the objects of particular importance in establishing and maintaining this connection — and, at times, in reshaping it.

EARTHEN OBJECTS

This section discusses three common objects made from the earth: adobe bricks, dirt roads and clay pots. It examines the way that they play important roles in discussions of racialised identities and activities.

Adobe bricks

On several of my visits to Piata, a fishing village on Lake Titicaca, I saw stacks of adobe bricks. These large bricks of sun-dried earth, roughly 50 cm × 25 cm × 12 cm, are so ubiquitous a feature of the Andean countryside that I had ceased paying attention to them several months after I first arrived in the region. They came suddenly and sharply into focus on one occasion when I accompanied my host, Pablo Armas, on a visit to the village school. He had mentioned to me that the village has not yet decided whether it would build a second schoolhouse to accommodate the students in the lower grades of secondary school, who currently had to walk a long distance to a school in another village, or whether it would simply add more rooms to the existing primary school. For either of these alternatives, each household would have to provide the three contributions that have been standard throughout

southern highland Peru for decades: a specified amount of cash for the windows and metal roof, a specified number of days of work, and a specified number of adobe bricks.

Once when Pedro Armas and I passed by the school site, we heard a conversation in which several people were mulling over a village-wide assembly that had been held several days earlier. The men and women with whom we spoke were scandalised. Another man, Francisco, who spent most of the year working in a distant city, had been absent from the village for a number of months. Having saved some cash while he had been away, he had suggested that he could contribute adobe bricks that he had purchased from another villager, rather than ones that he had made himself. There was no suggestion that he would give fewer bricks, nor would the bricks be inferior of quality. In fact, they would be identical to those which his proposed supplier had already provided and which were entirely acceptable. It was the notion of substituting purchased bricks for ones he made himself that several people found offensive. One of them, expressing his anger at Francisco in a single phrase, said, 'Who does he think he is, not to *pisar tierra*', using a phrase that literally means 'to step on the earth' and, more figuratively, means 'to tread down'. In this case, it referred to the actual labour of making adobe bricks. Dried earth is excavated from the earth, broken into fine pieces with a mallet or pick, and then placed in a small pit, into which water is gradually added. Individuals enter the pit barefoot and steadily tread the wet mass, to which straw, and more earth or water may be added, until it is thoroughly mixed and has reached the right texture. If it is too wet, it will be runny and soft, and not retain the form of the mould, but if it is not moist enough, it will be prone to crumble as it dries. Once the proper texture had been reached, the material is shovelled into wooden moulds and pressed down, and then left to dry in the sun for several weeks. The group of people at the construction site were resolved not to accept Francisco's offer of purchased adobe bricks, even if meant that the schoolroom would be slightly smaller.

A number of issues may have been at stake in this dispute — disagreements over the obligations of migrants, tensions between villagers more oriented towards the earning of cash income and those who relied more on subsistence agriculture, and other issues of village politics. Of interest to me at this point, though, was the simple retort: 'who does he think he is, not to tread earth?' The work of making adobes requires a number of abilities: the physical strength to keep pumping one's legs up and down in the thick mass, a sense of rhythm (those who tread too lightly will only mix the top layer of the mass, while those who push too hard might lose their balance and slip), and a tolerance for discomfort, since a severe charley horse of the calf muscles almost always follows a day of adobe-making. The villagers, though, did not criticise Francisco for being weak, unskilled, or overly concerned about his comfort. Having seen Francisco, a native of the village, work on earlier occasions, they knew that he, like all the other local people, was able to make adobes. Their complaint was a more fundamental one, that he implied that there was something demeaning about treading earth. Francisco had returned from the city to the territory of the village, but not to its work patterns. Unwilling to enter a pit full of mud, he had separated himself from the other villagers as well.

Dirt roads

The second incident takes place, not at a schoolhouse at the centre of a village, but at the boundaries of village lands, and involves, not a visit to a village for a kind of generalised ethnography, but the conduct of surveys in collaboration with a Peruvian government

agency, the Instituto del Mar del Perú or Peruvian Marine Institute, known generally by the acronym IMARPE. I accompanied IMARPE biologists to a number of villages, where we met with local residents, explained our project of conducting a survey of fishing effort and yield, and, once village assemblies gave us their approval, selected a random sample of fishermen. I was pleased by the positive reception which IMARPE received in the fishing villages on the shore of the lake, and also by the acceptance of the villages through whose lands we drove after we turned off the main road and headed down the narrow one-lane roads for the fishing villages right on the shore. I knew that this treatment was in contrast with the open hostility that had been accorded to the vehicles of some other government agencies, such as the Ministry of Fisheries, which might be greeted with hostile expressions, with angry words, or with rocks.

I often wondered how to account for this difference. The vehicles belonging to the various agencies looked fairly similar, painted in the red and white colours of the Peruvian flag and adorned with a large seal on the front doors. It seemed entirely plausible to me that the villagers might like some agencies, the Ministries of Health and Education, for example, and might dislike others, such as the police and the National Forestry Centre that threatened to interfere with the local practice of harvesting of reeds from the lake. However, I thought that IMARPE and the Ministry of Fisheries would fall into some middle ground of neutrality. Granted the often fragmented politics of the region and the conflicts between different villages, it was hard for me to believe that the Indian peasants in a number of villages located at some distance from the shores of the lake held uniformly positive opinions of IMARPE or negative views of the Ministry of Fisheries. Nor did I think that the local peasants would distinguish clearly among the large number of government agencies whose names often changed with shifts in national administrations. The IMARPE staff explained their reception to me in simple terms: before travelling out to a village, they would place an announcement in one of the native language radio stations, Aymara or Quechua depending on the region to which they were travelling, that indicated the date and approximate time of their arrival. The main point of these announcements was to remind villagers of meetings that had been scheduled days or weeks earlier. The IMARPE staff told me that these messages also served to alert the residents of the villages that lay between the main road and the shore to the movement of a government vehicle through their lands. By contrast, the villagers often challenged the vehicles of the agencies, like the Ministry of Fisheries, which did not make this gesture. I had been present when IMARPE and Ministry of Fisheries officials held joint meetings, and talked about the differing receptions that they received.

This explanation did not entirely satisfy me. I could understand that peasants might be suspicious of government officials who arrived unannounced in their villages and demanded to meet with them, but I did not see why they would object to an unfamiliar vehicle that merely drove down a road through their lands. I attributed a certain amount of class consciousness to the peasants, speculating that they believed, wisely or naively, I could not be sure, that any government agency that would alert peasants to its movements would not be up to any harm. Although there may be some truth to this possibility, I think that another factor is also significant. The background to the issue lies with scarcity of road traffic on these back roads and the great infrequency of entirely unknown vehicles. Villagers were distrustful of strangers on their lands. An outsider on foot or on a bicycle could greet local people and speak with them, but one in a motor vehicle was a different matter. To the officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, these narrow roads were part of a national

network of roads that connected the lakeshore villages with the main highland roads and that ultimately led to the capital city, Lima. These roads appeared on government maps, and the national Ministry of Transport and Communications would occasionally lend a heavy truck to carry tools or gravel out to assist the villagers who repaired the roads, either by forming large communal work groups to carry out the task or by assigning shorter stretches of road to individual households. To the Indians, though, the labour that they performed confirmed the fact that the roads were as much part of their village territory as the fields, the pastures, the houses, the school buildings and chapels, all of which they maintained through their work. In the minds of the government officials, then, the vehicles were on government territory, rather than village lands, as long as they remained moving on the roads; in the minds of the villagers, they entered the village territory as soon as they crossed from the neighbouring village.

Clay pots

Like the case of the dirt roads, the third incident derives from my frequent movement between town and countryside. Many people in both places knew that I travelled back and forth between these worlds, each dominated by different languages and customs. If I would announce my plans to leave one setting for the other, I would receive sympathetic warnings about the discomforts and perils that awaited me: the ferocious dogs that would attack me out in the Indian villages, the thieves who would sneak up on me in town. Among the hardships that was most frequently mentioned by Indians and mestizos alike was the lack of decent food. Each group deemed the other's food to be inferior to their own.

These comments gave me valuable insight into the complex world of food in the Lake Titicaca region. Much as the speech of the area includes European and American Indian languages (Spanish and the native Aymara and Quechua) which remain distinct languages, despite considerable lexical and grammatical exchange and high levels of bilingualism, so too the cuisine involves two distinct traditions, which I will term here mestizo and indigenous, the former concentrated in towns, the latter in the rural villages. They have been described in detail elsewhere (Ferroni, 1980; Johnsson, 1986; Orlove, 1987; Vokral, 1991). Both cuisines draw on a common core of local products, such as potatoes, grains, meat and fish, though the indigenous cuisine uses a wider variety of local tubers, grains and legumes, and the mestizo cuisine a greater amount of purchased ingredients such as rice and noodles. The differences appear more sharply in other aspects. The manner of preparing and serving the food is quite distinct. Soups are important to both, though mestizo meals frequently include fried dishes. Indigenous meals centre around one-dish meals, usually soups and stews, sometimes steamed tubers or grains, served out of a common pot. This emphasis is shown in the Quechua verb *wayk'uy*, which can mean either 'to cook' or 'to boil' depending on context. The mestizo meals usually involve the serving of several different dishes (a starchy staple and a stew, for example) and often consist of several courses. These differences reflect, among other things, the core values for food: mestizos emphasise variety and the presence of purchased ingredients, while Indians stress the abundance of food, both in terms of its quantity and its degree of starchiness. Indeed, the central theme of Jack Goody's (1982) book, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* applies to the Lake Titicaca region, with the mestizo cuisine closely resembling his account of the cuisines of stratified European and Asian societies, and the indigenous cuisines those of the labour-scarce egalitarian sub-Saharan African societies.

The familiar adage 'one is what one eats' applies remarkably well to the *altiplano*. Indians and mestizos find virtues in their own cuisines and defects in the others'. Indians value the strength that their food gives them, and deride mestizo food for not really filling them up. In reciprocal fashion, mestizos appreciate the flavour and richness of their own food, and express their disdain for indigenous food by proclaiming it to be monotonous or *feo* (ugly). I was not surprised when I was told that I would find 'nothing' to eat: the Indians meant that there would be small portions of food without enough starchiness, and the townspeople referred to the absence of anything appealing.

The one term that puzzled me was the reference that mestizos made to Indian food being *sucio*, dirty. In my own cultural framework, food can be unsanitary, spoiled, or unhygienic, but I would apply the word 'dirty' only to unwashed raw foods, such as apples, or to food that had fallen on the floor, like a sandwich. I reflected on the image of a buttered slice of bread that fell on the floor: if it landed buttered side up, it could be brushed off and eaten, while it would be discarded only if it landed buttered side down. The notion of 'dirty soup' did not make much sense to me; at best I could imagine a bowl of soup into which some bits of earth had fallen. I was fairly sure that most mestizos knew that Indians peeled their potatoes, washed some of their grains, and cooked their soup as long, if not longer, than mestizos, so I could not see why their soup would be dirtier. In my mind, the central meaning of 'dirty' involved the physical presence of a contaminating element; the metaphorical extensions (a dirty joke, a shade of dirty yellow) were clearly separate.

Perhaps Indian food was understood to be dirtied, or polluted, by its association with Indian bodies. I recalled an occasion when the owner of a large shop in Puno invited me to lunch. Just before we sat down to eat, he left the room, explaining that had to wash his hands. He had been touching money, he said. He seemed surprised when I asked him why money would make his hands need washing (I had been thinking of the many times when I had seen townspeople start meals without washing their hands, and of the dusty items that he handled and that did not prompt a washing). 'Anybody could have touched the money', he told me, suggesting that he wanted to avoid eating food that would be contaminated, even indirectly, by people from some low station in life. Still, the potatoes that we ate, apparently acceptably clean, had been harvested by Indians. Nor did I think that the storekeeper thought that Indians served soup in the manner that jokes sometimes depict slovenly waiters in restaurants as doing, with their thumbs in the hot liquid.

Perhaps some townspeople did mean that the food was unsanitary, unhealthy or somehow dangerous, without reference to any concrete contaminating element. However, I came to understand the source of pollution better when I heard a Spanish-speaking resident of a smaller town describe the water he had drunk from an earthenware cup. It had a '*sabor a tierra*', he said, an earthy taste. Water stored for a long time in clay vessels does indeed have a mild but distinct flavour, one that I happen to like but that I could imagine to be unappealing to others. What made the indigenous food dirty, I realised, was its contact with earthenware vessels. Using simple adobe stoves fuelled by dung, dry grasses, and sticks, Indians rely on clay pots to boil and steam their foods, clay pots made by Indian artisans in other villages and obtained by purchase or barter in marketplaces. Mestizos require metal pans for frying. They prefer to use metal saucepans rather than clay pots for boiling and stewing foodstuffs, particularly if they cook with gas or kerosene. These metal vessels are manufactured in small factories, often in coastal Peru, outside the highlands altogether. I never heard anyone complain of a metallic or tinny taste to food cooked in these pots and

pans, though. The vessels that imparted a taste were made of clay, clay that could still contaminate even though it had been smoothed and fired.

Many mestizos are highly sensitive to this 'earthy taste', and can notice it even when it is not very strong. To take examples more familiar to North American and European readers, this ability can be compared to the capacity of non-smokers to detect even the faintest traces of cigarette smoke, and to the immediacy with which vegetarians recognise a soup that was made from stock that included some bits of meat. This sensitivity to the taste of the earth is an index of the mestizo concern about Indian dirtiness, a concern that is simultaneously real (food can be contaminated by soot from fires, by windblown dust) and constructed (the fear of Indian filth stems from a sense that Indian backwardness itself can be contaminating).

EARTH-TOUCHING OBJECTS

The salience of the earth in everyday life in the *altiplano* can be demonstrated, not only by examining these earthen objects, but also by considering what can be termed 'earth-touching objects', the things that come into direct contact with the earth and that can separate the human body from the earth. In this section, I discuss shoes and floors, the two earth-touching objects most directly associated with daily life. Gade and Ríos (1972) review the Andean foot-plough, a key agricultural tool in the region and another important earth-touching object.

Shoes

Footwear is an important marker of social position in the *altiplano* — and one that has been relatively little discussed in the anthropological literature, especially in contrast to the extensive treatment of clothing and hats. One could draw a rough boundary between the higher-status people who wear shoes or boots and the others who go barefoot or wear the rubber sandals called *ojotas*. Of the numerous features of these sandals, I will mention only that they are inexpensive, that they leave much of the foot exposed, and that they are particularly effective in wet weather. A person in a rural area who wears shoes must take care to keep them as dry as possible to avoid damaging them, and so carefully picks a way across fields, roads and streams, rather than striding easily in the manner of someone who wears *ojotas* or goes barefoot. The layer of mud that forms on feet of someone wearing *ojotas* also serves as some protection from the cold; it provides some degree of insulation, unlike the wet socks (or wet shoes worn sockless) that carry heat away from the skin.

The opposites can be identified: muddy *ojotas* on an Indian in a field, well-polished shoes on a mestizo in town. This bifurcation, though, is not a precise marker of social position, for three reasons. Firstly, more than with the earthen objects, footwear signals age and gender differences as well as the ethnic, class and residential differences that distinguish Indian villagers from mestizo townspeople. Indian children, boys and girls alike, are even more likely to go barefoot than Indian adults; many mestizo townspeople show a great concern to keep their children's feet covered, often purchasing leather shoes for infants that will be outgrown before they learn to walk. Village women wear shoes less often than men, and on a narrower range of occasions; they are also more likely to go barefoot altogether than village men, who might only take off their *ojotas* for specific tasks. This feminisation of the Indian, and Indianisation of the woman, has been noted in terms of Quechua language use

and ethnic identity broadly for the department of Cusco, a nearby region in highland Peru (de la Cadena, 1991). And, though one could explain the tendency of wealthier urban women to wear high-heeled shoes simply as a sign of their conformity to fashions that originated elsewhere, or as part of their acceptance of items that limited their range of mobility, it could also be noted that these shoes remove them further from the earth, and tend to confine them to paved streets; a woman who wears high-heeled shoes in the rainy season suggests that she lives on a street with sidewalks, rather than on one of the unpaved alleys in the poorer neighbourhoods of town. As Seligmann (1993:194) notes in her fascinating discussion of insult-laden arguments between two sets of women, market vendors and their clients in the city of Cusco, high-heeled shoes are a sign that the woman who wears them does not perform physical labour — or wishes to suggest that she does not. Secondly, the type of footgear varies according to spatial context and activity. Many individuals cross this boundary between the people who wear shoes and those who at most wear sandals. A poor Indian peasant woman might go barefoot much of the time, though she would wear *ojotas* if walking to a distant field, and would put shoes on for important occasions such as a wedding or a visit to a government office. A wealthy woman in town would wear shoes when going out in the street (with a variety of shoes for different occasions and settings) but would be likely to have some kind of thong sandal to wear when doing chores around the house. By contrast, the first woman would be unlikely to shift from a *pollera* (full pleated skirt, usually of brightly coloured wool) to a *vestido* (modern Western skirt), just as the second would not move in the opposite direction. (The switching of clothing that does occur takes place closer to the middle of the scale. For example, an urban high school student who wears pants or a *vestido* to school might put on a *pollera* when she helps her mother in her market stall or when she returns to her parents' village; even she would change her footgear more easily than her clothes.) Thirdly, there are variants within each of the two categories. Within the first, there is the contrast between going barefoot and wearing *ojotas*, and there is a great multiplicity of styles, prices and degree of wornness among shoes and boots. A pair of leather men's shoes that a bank employee purchased might first serve him to wear to the office, and then, when a bit more worn, for outings to the countryside. Once, despite his care, the leather began to crack or tear, he could pass them on to a poorer relative or acquaintance; the shoes might begin a second life as a peasant's good shoes, and then, perhaps after being patched, end up as shoes fit only for being worn while working in fields.

Shoes differ not only in terms of type and age, but also in their degree of polish. Urban residents place a great deal of emphasis on having well-shined shoes. They prefer shoes to be not merely free from any adhering mud or soil, but also polished to a bright luster. This emphasis on having immaculate shoes may account for the popularity of smooth plastic shoes for women who cannot afford leather, rather than inexpensive running or tennis shoes, since the plastic can be easily wiped clean.

Despite these elaborations and variations, the mestizos tend toward footwear that prevents contact with the earth and that displays this lack of contact through its shininess; the Indians have footwear more open to the earth, when they wear shoes at all. This contrast reinforces the images that each group carries of the other: for the Indians, of the mestizos whose unwillingness to soil their shoes compounds their reluctance to work; for the mestizos, of the Indians whose grimy unprotected soles harden and crack, the cracks then filling with dirt so that no precise boundary can be located between flesh and earth.

Floors

A second contrast in the region can be drawn between the dirt floors, usually packed to a hard, firm and level surface, of peasant houses and the floors of other materials in town. As with shoes, the floors in town come in a variety of substances: wood, cement or linoleum in the rooms, and concrete, tiles or stone in the interior patios. Only a small fraction of the urban houses have rooms with floors covered with the most preferred material, wooden parquet tiles that can be burnished to a high sheen. Here, too, the emphasis is on a shiny polish, an effect that can also be reached with linoleum and with some sorts of concrete. Uncommon in urban areas, dirt floors are found principally in poorer neighbourhoods on the outskirts of town. Even very rough wood, such as unsanded pieces from packing crates, is used as a kind of flooring material, rather than leaving the dirt uncovered.

Though most floors are left without rugs or carpets, there is some use of floor coverings in the region. Much as Indian peasants always put a cloth down before sitting on the ground out of doors, they place sheepskins or small reed mats on the dirt floors of their houses. They move these as tasks and comfort dictate. A woman might bring one nearer to the stove in the kitchen if she were cooking, and move it back closer to the door if she were peeling potatoes indoors on a rainy day. The houses in town often have a doormat just inside the main door, used especially for wiping the soles of shoes before entering. Other than an occasional hooked or woven wool rug under a coffee table in the living room, though, these houses generally lack rugs and carpets. This absence might seem odd, since the floors are often cold at the high elevation, and wool and animal skins for rugs and reeds for mats are abundant in the region. Some households decorate their walls with a few small rugs, usually of pieces of alpaca pelts cut and sewn into geometric forms or designs that highlight the contrasting tones of white, brown and black fur and that illustrate regionalist or folkloric themes, such as an Indian playing a flute. Other urban households tack reed mats to the walls of kitchens and dining rooms to protect them from soiling, a simple kind of wainscoting. The bareness of floors seems to be linked on the one hand to the wish to display the floors themselves, and on the other to the concern that rugs and carpets can become permanently soiled. This concern extends to the synthetic carpets used in automobile interiors. Car-owners, nearly all urban mestizos, usually purchase specially made washable rubber mats (*pisos de goma*) to place in the floor of the back seats of their cars to protect them against dirt.

There are also differences in the brooms with which floors are swept. Women sweep houses each morning in both town and countryside, sometimes scattering water to make the dust cohere. Indian women are more likely to use a simple kind of whisk broom, a handful of dry grass tied with a piece of string or cord also made from dry grass. They sweep the debris from the rooms into the courtyard and from the courtyard out to a path or open area in front of the house. If they wish to pick up the swept debris to carry it directly outside, they will improvise almost any flat surface — a scrap of cardboard, a broken piece of a clay pot, a bit of plastic sheeting from a fertiliser sack. Women in town prefer a broom with a handle and with straws that have been sewn and bound. To pick up the dust and debris, they use another object: a large rectangular can, usually a 40-litre can of lard or vegetable oil, which is cut in half along a diagonal and nailed to a stick. The resulting item, *basurero* in Spanish and *qhoncha oqarina* in Quechua, serves to transport debris, often to a cardboard box where it is held until the neighbourhood garbage truck makes its rounds or until someone carries to a dump site on the edge of town. Though households in the towns of the *altiplano* have

many inexpensive brightly-coloured plastic items such as, basins, water jugs, and the like, I have never seen a version of the North American dustpan, possibly because its short handle would place its user unacceptably close to the earth.

DISCUSSION

Adobe bricks, dirt roads and clay pots are linked through their connection to the earth, the earth from which they are quite literally made. They suggest that the villagers can be understood, not only as Indians and as peasants who differ from townspeople in terms of racial, ethnic or class categories, but also as people who are closely connected to the earth. This connection is more than a general association with agriculture, more than a bucolic evocation of field and pasture, more than a personal or collective bond with local landscapes that came from settled village life. The villagers touch the earth with tools and with their hands and feet to make ordinary objects; their bodies are in contact with these objects every day. The types of footwear that people use, the materials from which they make their floors and the objects that they place on the floors all demonstrate the greater proximity of the Indians to the earth. In the concern of the mestizos to have clean, polished shoes and floors, as in their avoidance of earthen objects, can be seen their efforts to distance themselves from the earth.

More generally, the patterns of use of these objects suggest that Indians and mestizos agree that the difference between them can be understood by their relations, not only to each other, but to a third entity, the earth. The villagers are not merely people who are close to the earth; they are also people whose proximity to the earth is underscored by the townspeople's distance from it. The Indians seek to maintain this proximity to the earth, as in the case of the dispute over the making of adobe bricks, much as the mestizos avoid the earth, even in the form of clay pots. This issue of relative proximity to the earth fits well with the nature of Indianness in the region. Though Indian identity at times seems fixed, as based on membership in specific village communities, at other times it is fluid and relational; a vendor in a village market might be more Indian than the driver of the truck who brought her there and less Indian than the woman whose potatoes she has purchased. Here, too, proximity to the earth is not an absolute, but rather a measure of difference, between people, between activities, between places and between objects.

The two sets of people would agree on the salience of the relative proximity to the earth and would both take it as a sign of the naturalness of the association of Indians as people who work in fields. However, they understand the basis and significance of this proximity to the earth in different ways. Since the earth has many attributes, it lends itself to different interpretations, much as racial ideologies, with their complex histories and contradictory political manifestations, tend towards different expressions. To sketch quickly some of the more widely held views, the mestizos take the Indians' proximity to the earth as a sign of their inferiority, a literal inferiority, since the mestizos stress the lowness of the earth. By contrasting the paved streets and sidewalks of the towns with the open fields and dirt roads of the villages, the mestizos also take the Indians' proximity to the earth as a sign of their distance from the national culture and institutions, based in large cities and especially in Lima, and from civilisation in general; similarly, the mestizos link the ancient and permanent quality of the earth with the Indians' static qualities, their backwardness and lack of progress. They conceive of fired brick as a better substance from which to make houses than adobe bricks, which are crude and rustic, and less capable of being painted, much as they

view dirt roads as the last and least portion of the national road network, or clay pots as poor substitutes for metal vessels. The mestizo comments that Indians 'live like animals' can be oblique references to earthen houses, since animals are often stabled in adobe structures. The tendency of dust and mud to cling to the human body makes the Indians' proximity to the earth a sign of their capacity to contaminate others with these inferior qualities. (Some left-wing mestizo intellectuals, especially in earlier decades, inverted the significance of this association. For them, the Indians had a 'telluric' quality. Their indissoluble association with Andean earth made them the source of Peruvian nationhood. This association led some intellectuals to bring Indian claims into broader historical and political agendas; José Carlos Mariátegui was famed for saying that Peru's Indian problem was a problem of the *tierra*, understood primarily as an issue of land tenure and distribution. For other intellectuals, this association tended to silence the Indians; the elevation of the Indians into a symbol of an eternal and unchanging nationhood also meant that the Indians were not capable of autonomous action.)

The Indians' accounts emphasise other qualities of the earth. The earth's productivity, its ability to grow crops and to be transformed into bricks, pots, roads and other objects, shows the importance of human skill and human labour, and signals communal labour in the construction and maintenance of dirt roads, in the building of village schools and chapels. This productivity also suggests the unproductiveness of the mestizos, marked also by their unwillingness to engage in physical labour and their fussiness over their shoes and their appearance in general. The range of the earth's products indicates the self-sufficiency and autonomy of the villagers, and hints at their mutual interdependence: clay pots are made in villages that specialise in ceramic production and traded to villages that emphasise agriculture and livestock raising. Though the villagers are linked with the nation by some of these products of the earth, the schoolhouses to which teachers come, the dirt roads that facilitate travel to cities, the ties of these products to Indian labour and to communal assemblies suggest the Indians' control over these links (Orlove, 1991a). Finally, the Indians understand the ancient and permanent quality of the earth in a different way, as a sign of the Indians' capacity to survive and endure.

A final point of contrast is the narrativisation of the earth. The Indian villagers frame their historical accounts in terms of continuity and permanence, while the townspeople often speak of the forward movement of national progress that expands outward from cities and inland from the coast. The Indians describe the great time depth of the association between people and the landscape from which they draw their sustenance; the mestizos stress the unfinished nature of the project of national integration (Orlove, 1993). As I have discussed elsewhere in my examination of Indian uprisings (Orlove, 1991b), the fear of the Indian villagers is that of invasion, of troops or police that rush in from outside, while the fear of the mestizo townspeople is that of siege, of being surrounded and cut off. At times it seems as if the European conquests were still taking place, the outcome of these late stages still partially undetermined.

To summarise further this already condensed account of these different views, one could say that the mestizos stress the low and contaminating qualities of the earth, the Indians its permanence and strength, different views of the same racial images. In these ways, the connection between race and the earth in the *altiplano* forms part of other aspects of races as well. These linkages between race and earth carry particular forces in the *altiplano* because the earth is present in many ways. It is immediately visible throughout the region. There are no metropolitan cities where soil can be glimpsed only in parks or gardens. The two largest

towns in the department of Puno each have about only 100,000 inhabitants, and none of the others exceed 20,000. In addition to knowing that fields lie near these towns, the mestizos can see from everywhere in town the bare surfaces of hills and mountains, greenish brown in the rainy season, yellowish brown at other times of year. This presence of the earth is made even more immediate by the importance of agriculture in the regional economy and by the importance of root crops, especially potatoes, in the diet.

Like all people, the mestizos and Indians walk on the earth and know that the earth's surface extends beyond their immediate territory. This quality of the continuity of the earth's surface is heightened for both groups the importance in this region of the contrast between terrestrial and aquatic realms. It would be hard to overemphasise the physical and cultural salience of Lake Titicaca, the vast sheet of water more than 8000 square kilometres in area that lies at the centre of the region. Also of great importance is the proximity to the border that separates Peru and Bolivia. The customs inspection sites at some distance from the border, the market vendors who accept both currencies, the radio stations from both countries that can be picked up throughout the region, the trucks bearing foreign license plates, the commonness of contraband goods — these all suggest a contrast between Peruvian and Bolivian portions of the earth's surface. By underscoring the territorial boundedness of the nation, these features all suggest the link between identity and the earth.

If the two groups agree on the greater proximity of Indians to the earth, they also agree on a complementary object. The mestizos are closer than the Indians to the nation. The adobe bricks made by a household contrast with purchased adobe bricks, purchased with money, with the national currency. For the mestizos, the roads are part of a single national network (a network that is able to link, or, more literally, *comunicar*, 'to communicate'). To the Indians the same roads are as a product of their labour, a part of the territory of the villages. The metal vessels also indicate a connection with a national economy, with interregional trade and national currency; the vessels are also the means to cook purchased ingredients from the national economy, such as rice from the coast. Though mestizos sometimes appeal to the figure of *suelo* (soil) as a metonym for the nation, this soil is simply treated as a portion of the planet's surface, its material dirty muddiness abstracted away (Anderson, 1991). The exiled political leader returning to Peru after years of forced absence, displaying patriotic fervour by kissing Peruvian *suelo*, would kneel to press lips to the concrete of an airport runway rather than to actual earth.

Other scholars have shown that systems of racial inequality can be examined in the context of specific national histories of economic and political struggle (Roedigger, 1991) and in the context of the broad sweep of world history in recent centuries (Malik, 1996). Both of these perspectives suggest sources for this linkage between earth and race in Peru. Peru shares with many countries a complex emergence of modern forms of nationhood, in which national citizens are tied to a national territory. It draws on a diverse set of ideologies to shape this nationhood. In the pre-modern views of Spanish imperial rule, the entire colonial enterprise was justified in terms of bringing the earth under the rule of Christian monarchs; the Indians were the *naturales*, the natural ones, registered and identified with particular places, obligated to provide labour and goods to their Christian rulers. The modern Enlightenment notions of civilisation and progress, dovetailing with Romantic notions of national essences and national wills, developed further the idea of the nation as a project into which culturally distinct citizens must be incorporated. The nineteenth-century emphasis on hygiene (Hoy, 1995) took hold in the Andes, and dovetailed neatly with the different urban mestizo discourses of civilising the Indian, whether phrased as

'incorporating the aboriginal population' (a phrase still in use in the late 1950s) or more simply as 'development'. Moreover, as Gudeman and Rivera (1990) have shown, the theories which view the earth as a source of human energy and well-being date back to Greek thought, and have had a long history in economic thought in Europe and Latin America; they may be present as well in the Indians' view that human strength is derived from the earth. Other Andean views, particularly those of the Incas, were quite distinct: the association of rulers with particular sacred sites to which villages and provinces were linked; the notions, developing gradually during the colonial period, of the reciprocity which links agricultural peoples, mountain spirits, and the earth (Salomon, 1987; Urton, 1990; Gose, 1994).

In addition to these sources, specific to Europe and the Andes, there are other, more general ones. Weberian approaches to the cultural elaboration of divisions between labouring and administrative classes in stable agrarian societies emphasise the contrast between rural peasants and urban officials (Roth and Wittich, 1968). The seminal works of Norbert Elias, an early cultural historian of European courts, suggest a dynamic of the civilising process that can extend beyond the European cases that he considers (Mennell, 1995). In *The History of Manners* (1978) and *Power and Civility* (1982), he argues that the refinement of manners and a distancing from animality and nature are fundamental aspects of the elaboration of the codes of etiquette which support the interactions among individuals unacquainted with one another in complex economic and political organisations. He suggests that these codes develop earlier and more fully in urban centres and spread slowly to the countryside.

In sum, this theme of the relative proximity to the earth helps elucidate the distinctive features of racial identity in the Andes described in the introduction: the sense that the differences between Indians and mestizos are, on the one hand, profound and enduring, and, on the other, fluid and situational. This theme does not mark off two separate categories, but rather establishes a continuum, both of whose poles cannot be reached. Everyone eats food that grows in the earth, and everyone walks on the earth, whether directly standing barefoot on soil, or whether slightly removed by shoes, floors and streets. Total separation from the earth is thus impossible. This continuum allows the judgment of relative as well as absolute racial differences: someone can be more or less Indian than someone else, rather than either sharing a common Indianness or being marked by an absolute difference between Indian and mestizo. Moreover, individuals can gradually alter their position on this continuum. Though the proximity of an individual, household or community to the earth is relatively stable, it can slowly shift overt time. To take examples of individuals, a move into town displaces an Indian peasant somewhat from the earth; a move from an adobe house on an unpaved alley at the outskirts of town into a brick house on a paved street would entail a further displacement, as would employment in a more earth-distant occupation (working as a maid in a prosperous home, for example, rather than sitting on a mat on the ground and selling fruit in a market). Though movement in the reverse direction is less common, it certainly occurs as mestizo townspeople gradually can become more closely tied to the earth. A married couple, firmly established as mestizo urban storekeepers, born on the coast and settled in a provincial capital, might witness the gradual process by which their son or daughter became more Indian, settling on a plot of land purchased outside town, working in the fields alongside hired labourers, shifting residence to an adobe house in a village, eating local food.

The theme of the proximity to the earth also helps clarifies two distinct attributes of race in the Andes. On the one hand, race, like the earth, is usually naturalised and taken for

granted. On the other hand, the artificiality of racial differences sometimes erupts and breaks the texture of daily life, because the constructedness of racial differences among humans shares an artificiality with the constructedness of differences in relations between humans and the earth. Much as we are all members of the same species, we are all residents of our shared home, the earth. These commonalities can undermine the structures of belief and practice that separate the earth-nearer Indians from the earth-farther mestizos. An Indian peasant migrant returns from the city to the village and creates a minor stir when he refuses to remove his shoes and enter the mud-pit for making adobes; a foreign anthropologist, travelling between town and village, provokes a concern in each place that he will go hungry in the other. This disruption can proceed even further. In the instance of the Indian peasants who challenge the right of government vehicles to use village roads without some form of advance notice, one may note elements of overt political conflict. These elements, in turn, serve as a reminder that systems of racial difference, for all that they appear to be wholly naturalised and internalised, are mutable.

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