

# Generalizations and impositions: redefining the Andean

## Abstract

The Andes have been a melting pot of cultures, myths and traditions rooted in the richness of their past human interactions and manifestations. However, in this sense, the “Andean” emerges as a concept that has evolved as history and anthropology have challenged and redefined the perception of this region. That is why this article dives into this term, through an analysis, with special emphasis on four points that allow a review and evaluation of how to interpret the Andean from historical anthropology: the stereotypes imposed by society, the geographical boundaries as conditioning factors, and the legacy of the colony and government policies that respond to an agenda. It is pertinent to practice a reflective look through which we seek to understand and appreciate the complexity of the Andean in its current evolution, based on the challenges and opportunities that arise in the search for an interpretation.

**Keywords:** Andean, historical anthropology, conceptual redefinition, the Andes

Volume 7 Issue 6 - 2023

**Pablo Rodrigo Quiroz Chambilla**

Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, Bolivia

**Correspondence:** Pablo Rodrigo Quiroz Chambilla, Degree in Social Communication from the Universidad Católica Boliviana “San Pablo” (UCB), undergraduate student of History at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (UMSA), Bolivia, Email [prodrigoquiroz@gmail.com](mailto:prodrigoquiroz@gmail.com)

**Received:** November 24, 2023 | **Published:** December 04, 2023

## Introduction

The “Andean”, as a concept, when defining it fell into the field of ambiguity due to external factors that led it to carry an unclear meaning. This represents a problem when pursuing the historian’s objective: to know and understand humanity as it is. Therefore, this essay aims to answer the following question: how is “Andean” interpreted and what was the perception of it over the years? That is to say, this concept will be approached from the relationships between each chapter of history, how it was modified over the years and what were the factors that today made it a subject that requires attention. The limits will be identified taking into account certain considerations such as those postulated by history, anthropology and ethno history, some academic works and the different contexts over time.

It is necessary, as part of the introduction of this paper, to start from a quote by Ana Maria Lorandi<sup>1</sup> they continue to cling to the present and do not use a methodology to interrogate the past of societies. At most, they carry out a short lapse history”. It is necessary that, starting from the exclusive work of a historian, supported by an anthropologist, we resort to the understanding of the past from the inside, or as Lorandi<sup>1</sup> also says: “History is the one that will try to participate in the facts but from the inside”.

Regarding the term Andean and its interpretation, Estermann<sup>2</sup> proposes a study of this concept from three approaches. The first responds to a polysemic category that is used to refer simultaneously to the geographical location, cultural tradition, ethnic identity and origin of people. This word is also used here to refer to the great mountain massif or range that runs from north to south across the South American continent, occupying the territorial spaces of seven countries: Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina and Chile. The second approach addresses the existence of cultural nuclei as areas of interaction in the Andean space, generating the possibility of identifying ancestral forms of life and thought, which in their conception are different from the current cultures belonging to the modern western world. These forms of existence and thought serve as evidence to propose whether there is an Andean culture. And the third approach also refers to an ethnic category, thus speaking of the Andean man or the Andean people. The author is not declaring that

there is a pure pre-Hispanic Andean race, but that the human being reaches this identification from a sense of belonging rooted in the Andean geographic, social and cultural environment. However, in this task of proposing some interpretation for this concept, the same author recognizes that to denominate the Andean with a terminology, without falling into the ideological and self-dominant, is a great difficulty.

Based on this, for this work, in addition to working with texts of a historical nature, anthropology was used to a lesser extent. In this sense, Evans Pritchard<sup>3</sup> postulates: “the fact that the anthropologist makes a first-hand study and the historian does it through documents is a technical and not a methodological difference”. In other words, he will seek to build social and cultural structures that allow a glimpse into the past, in mutual cooperation, of pre-Hispanics and Europeans. This is the starting point for historical anthropology in Latin America to redefine, among its many tasks, the concept of the “Andean”. At this point, a new term appears, which, according to Lorandi,<sup>1</sup> will be related to historical anthropology because it also resorts to instruments of inquiry used by history. The anthropologist clarifies that “it is incorrect to use ‘ethno’, ‘ethnic’ to refer to any manifestation of aboriginal imprint... so that American ethno history deals with the Indians and anthropology investigates the activity of the Indians”.

## The problem in question through four factors

John Murra confesses that if there is a latent and forced look only at Cusco, thus assuming that the Andean world revolves around it, it is necessary to look at other surrounding regions. This would give space to debates about the Andean, the Indian and the peasantry in this part of the world. Thus, ethno history will have to face the following question: how should the Andean be encompassed? Isabelle Combes<sup>4</sup> will put the following warning on the table for debate: “We must not fall into generalizations”. Four points will be addressed to clarify the question of how to interpret the Andean from the perspective of historical anthropology: the stereotypes imposed by society regarding the Andean, the geographical limits as conditioning factors at the time of classification, the legacy of the colony, and government policies as part of an agenda that responds to certain interests.

On the stereotypes imposed by society. Frank Salomon<sup>5</sup> postulates the following: “the indigenist discourse came from the top down. It

was not a healthy pluralism and the term indigenous was loaded with unacceptable connotations". Sadly, it fell into ideas of regionalist social class division based on the place of origin, in this case the Andean. So one task was to break that assumption of supporting the existence of a dichotomy between the Andean and non-Andean. Salomon adds that the struggle against stereotypes should not be hidden by trying to group everything under the term indigenous. De La Cadena<sup>6</sup> states the following: "a deindianization is to disassociate the local/communal identity from the indigenous stigma". Salomon proposes an example of the case of the Huarochiris. This people fall into the stigmatization imposed by the environment, society, since they fall into the practice of qualifying them as Andean because they resemble the natives of this region, despite the fact that they communicate in Spanish. This insistence on distinguishing them leads them to be called provincials, Indians or more pejorative terms.

On the arrival and legacy of the colony: What defines the Andean? The Inca spoke of ethnic peoples and referred to them as inhabitants of the world. At the beginning of the 20th century, the term Andean was validated. From this, in 1492, Luis Centello also used the term Andean in the United States alluding to 'anti', which refers to high jungle. From this will originate a position from historians: "history does not focus on the Inca, but on peoples who had encounters with the Spanish in the sixteenth century". Alejandra Ramos,<sup>7</sup> on the other hand, will postulate the following idea: "it is difficult to access a knowledge of the pre-Hispanic reality from colonial sources, for this reason the discussion about the Andean of the pre-Columbian era is pending". In this way it is being affirmed that the Andean will take prominence from the colonial era with the arrival of the Spaniards because they will be the ones to include the story of the "other" in their chronicles as an observable element, actor of that reality and not as a narrator. In this way a line is demarcated that divides the colonial world with the Andean, as an actor alien to a territory that actually belonged to them. Ramos<sup>7</sup> concludes his reflection by making the following recommendation: "ethno history should be built as an interdisciplinary field (between history and anthropology) that uses written sources for the construction of Andean society from the colonial and pre-Hispanic".

Regarding the geographical limits as conditioning factors when classifying the Andean and non-Andean, according to Luis Lumbreras:<sup>8</sup> "the literature on Andean archaeology offers a segmented, localist, national image, in terms of current frontiers. From the point of view of archaeology, the Andes range from Venezuela to Argentina". That is to say, the limits marked by each nation as a result of war conflicts, negotiations or decrees, are a determining factor to classify the Andean. As long as it is within these borders, the subjects to be studied will be called "Andean". Even this starts from much earlier. Ramos<sup>7</sup> states that the idea of Andean area is associated with the territory conquered by the Incas. This may be the reference so that today it is the current geographical boundaries that dictate what is or is not Andean.

And finally, on government policies as part of an agenda that responds to certain interests. It is common knowledge that governments will use Andean issues as part of their political strategies, either to gain sympathizers, or as a springboard to achieve their goals and camouflage their interests in the name of the indigenous peoples. As seen above, there is a tendency to make generalizations such as the exercise of grouping together everything that encompasses the territories classified as Andean. Molinié<sup>9</sup> states the following in this regard: "the history of the Indian in communities will be despised", even "the ideologies of nations will resort to the image of the Indian to place him as the basis of their respective nations". In this way, the

Indian is slowly valued again, but not as a form of vindication as an actor in society but as "a contribution to the government of the day to promote indigenism, the Andean, and thus achieve a political gain that translates into support". In addition to this, the stereotype that is imposed, according to Molinié,<sup>9</sup> "the anthropological Indian is valued but as a cultural heritage. This will have repercussions on the teaching plans of the schools and the value given to the indigenous product of the western area of the continent".

## Conclusion

Finally, José Luis Martínez<sup>10</sup> argued that "homogeneity gave way to a certain fragmentation and to the search for edges of the Andean that differentiates it from other worlds". In this work, a review was made of the factors, from pre-Columbian times and passing through colonial times that in some way may interfere in how the Andean is interpreted today. It should not be denied that over time, due to different causes, the concept of the Andean was distorted, even reaching the level of ambiguity. It is pertinent to address these questions regarding the limits or the definition of the Andean from a reevaluation from the bases that include geographic space, temporal space, causes, and consequences and leave aside generalizations, assumptions or impositions.

## Acknowledgments

None.

## Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to the present work.

## Funding

None.

## References

1. Lorandi AM. Ethnohistory, historical anthropology, or simply history? *Mem Am*; 2012.
2. Estermann Josef. Andina Philosophy: Indigenous wisdom for a new world. Quito: Abya Yala; 1998.
3. Evans Pritchard. Social anthropology: past and present. *Man*. 2021;30(2):e191852–e191852.
4. Combès I. The little lady potterera. Apostates, donecillos and ethnic dynamics in Chiquitos. *Camps-Revista de Antropologia*. 2008;9(2):23–41.
5. Salomon F. An unethnic ethnohistory: notions of the autochthonous in a Peruvian peasant community. *Desacatos*. 2001;(7):65–84.
6. Cadena M D L. The political tensions of representations and misrepresentations: Intellectuals and mestizos in Cuzco (1919-1990). *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*. 1996;2(1):112–147.
7. Ramos A. The development of Andean Ethno history through the (re)definition of the Andean (1970-2005). *Frontiers of History*. 2018;23(2):8–43.
8. Lumbreras L. Arqueología de la América Andina. Lima: Milla Batres; 1981.
9. Molinié A. Andean anthropology, between history and ethnology. Abstracts of papers of the III International Congress of Ethnohistory. El Quisco. Chile; 1993.
10. Martínez J. "La construcción de identidades y de lo identitario en los estudios andinos (para continuar un debate)". Proceedings of the First Symposium on Andean Thought. Cuenca, Ecuador; 2005. 89–112 p.