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## Review/Reseña

Charles F. Walker, *Shaky Colonialism. The 1746 Earthquake-Tsunami in Lima, Peru and its Long Aftermath*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008.

### **From Catastrophe to Fear: The Social Repercussions of the 1746 earthquake in Lima**

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In *Shaky Colonialism*, Charles F. Walker offers an in-depth look at the natural phenomenon of Lima's 1746 devastating earthquake and its repercussions on the social, religious, and political relationships that were to dominate the viceregal capital through the second half of the eighteenth century. His critical analysis of the earthquake is based on the memories of Viceroy Manso de Velasco, documents written by José Eusebio Llano y Zapata, the chronicle by Franciscan Friar Calixto Tupak Inca, *Representación verdadera*, and accounts of the festivities celebrating the coronation of Fernando VI, as well as many legal accounts and anonymous texts. Walker examines how the city was thought, reformed, and rebuilt under the leadership of Viceroy Manso, and how this natural disaster

prompted debates and disagreements in religious and civil sectors of the population with regard to Manso's plans and intentions. According to Walker, the earthquake generated strong disputes about religion, moral behavior, social order, and the rebuilding of the city. As he succinctly states, the earthquake developed into "a virtual referendum on Lima" on "how to create a more manageable city along the lines of European urban reform of the period" (12). Two major ideas emerged from the interpretation of the natural disaster. Religious groups viewed it as a sign of God's wrath upon the city's sinful ways, while political authorities such as Viceroy Manso de Velasco interpreted the earthquake as the result of the city's vanity and wasteful spending. Each chapter offers a fascinating discussion on how these two forces came into play in determining how the city was to be redesigned within the Enlightenment politics and the Bourbon reforms as well as the resistance that surfaced from different social groups. The chapters also focused on the multiple debates and controversies that emerged as a result of Manso's plans of reorganization and rebuilding.

Chapter 1 introduces the relationship that developed between earthquakes, tsunamis and absolutism in Lima. According to Walker, the natural disaster prompted crucial Enlightenment debates about nature and power and how the city as well as its inhabitants needed to be reformed. For example, proposals on how to redesign the city were highly influenced by the reforms imposed by the absolutist Bourbon regime. Walker explains how this regime encouraged a politics of social homogenization yet lacking social equality. The result of such reforms weakened the position of diverse social groups in Peru as well as the influential power of the Church. When the viceroy Manso de Velasco, as representative of the Crown, decided to impose a series of reforms to rebuild the city and the population, the Church as well as other social groups including Indians reacted in a variety of ways. Their opposition against some of Manso's reforms and the manner in which they reacted will be the focus of the following chapters.

The second chapter centers on the premonitions that preceded the earthquake, based primarily on the recollection of José Llano Zapata's accounts. Although Llano Zapata blamed the earthquake on natural causes, the majority of Lima's inhabitants perceived it as the wrath of God due to

the errant behavior of Lima's population. Religious sectors of the population, such as the nuns, supported this latest explanation, arguing that the sinful customs of the city had created the catastrophe and that the earthquake constituted a premonition of more punishments to follow. As a result, different sectors of the population were to be blamed for the disaster and therefore deemed responsible for the city's moral decline, including Church representatives and the nuns themselves. The further premonitions discussed within the cloisters prompted large-scale fear within the population. However, the authorities blamed the nuns for causing an extreme atmosphere of fear through the account of their premonitions. For Walker, these premonitions were a reflection of the mentality of the era in which nuns associated these visions with messages of God and prophetic warnings. The debates that prompted those premonitions, he adds, affected the manner in which the city was rebuilt not only physically, but also institutionally and socially.

In chapter 3 the author traces the physical and urban division of Lima prior to the earthquake, including the areas that each racial group - including Indians, *chinos*, and blacks, as well as other caste groups - inhabited. Although Lima's aristocracy occupied privileged spaces, there was a patent fear on their behalf toward other sectors of the population. The once sought segregation of the city was being affected by the fact that diverse racial groups, as a result of the chaos, had now temporarily occupied certain areas previously forbidden to them. With the earthquake, Walker explains, the city was turned upside down, blurring many racial and social boundaries that had been long established. The earthquake contributed to an environment of chaos in which Spaniards, Creoles, Indians, Blacks and other caste groups shared the consequences of the same epidemics and death or, as Walker states, "an endless set of horrors" (72). Still, architecture served for the upper classes as a means to wield superiority and prestige over those other groups who were threatening their privileged spaces.

In "Stabilizing the Unstable and Ordering the Disorderly" (Chapter 4), Walker focuses on the deterioration of social order and control in Lima as well as in adjacent Callao, a major South American port. This

deterioration prompted Viceroy Manso to rebuild a more rational city in which new notions of circulation of space emerged. The author discusses the resistance Manso confronted by upper class citizens and the Church with regard to how this ideal city was to be rebuilt and how property, capital, and order would be managed. Manso strongly believed that the vanity of Lima's inhabitants was reflected in the inadequate constructions of buildings with boasted arrogant towers rather than buildings of sound design. For Manso, the earthquake symbolized God's way to punish the arrogance of the inhabitants who had wasted their money to construct buildings for social prestige. As a result of unstable buildings, a disruption of social order emerged when citizens of all social classes were forced to live in temporary buildings.

Chapter 5 examines specific obstacles faced by government authorities when imposing their proposed urban reforms, as overseen by the French astronomer, mathematician, and architect Luis Godin. Property owners vehemently opposed the proposed reforms, arguing that they had the right to build grandiose residences, that the material they used (*quincha*) was able to withstand earthquakes, that they could not cover the cost of turning two-story houses into single story ones, and that they, due to their social status, had the right "to loom above the city" (98). However, for Manso and Godin it was imperative in terms of urban planning to construct wider streets and lower buildings to assure safety. As Charles F. Walker states, Manso did not pretend to banish social distinctions but rather attempted "to reduce the clout of Lima's upper echelon" (97). Manso's efforts did not stop despite legal complaints, and his urban redesigning transformed Lima into a more neoclassical, secular city in which flat roofs of adobe and *quincha*—materials derived from pre-Hispanic societies—stood out. The earthquake served as an excuse to weaken the presence of the Church in the viceregal capital and to regulate architectural grandeur for the sake of political and social order.

The restructuring of the Church as a result of the natural disaster is the focus of chapter 6, "Licentious Friars, Wandering Nuns, and Tangled *Censos*: A Shakeup of the Church." At the time of the disaster the Church owned 38% of the property in Lima and offered ample resistance to the

reforms promoted by the Bourbon regime. The government criticized the independence and unruliness of the mendicant orders, especially their excesses and scandalous behavior. They believed this was due to the high number of ecclesiastical members held in convents and their spiritual, physical, and economical presence in Lima. The government believed that the Church was responsible in part for Lima's lax moral standards. As a result, Manso took advantage of the earthquake to impose limitations on the number of convents in Lima as well as Callao, to transfer jurisdiction of rural parishes from regulars to seculars, to consolidate convents, and to regulate *censos* to put their finances in order. For Walker, the secularization of the Church in Lima proved to be a great point of contention and an important regalist tool to increase the State control over the Church.

Chapter 7 is devoted to another sector of Lima's population who were also blamed for the great natural disaster: women. Government officials and religious authorities interpreted the earthquake as a punishment for women's vanity and immoral behavior. This allegation served as an excuse for colonial authorities to establish preventive measures to improve the moral character of the female population. The control of women's behavior and dressing habits such as the use of the *manto and saya* was at the forefront of the sumptuary laws imposed in the eighteenth century. As Walker explains, "decency, opulence, luxury, and profanity" seemed to be "the fundamental elements in the rhetoric and policies in Bourbon Peru" (139). Walker discusses several European authors such as Frezier, De la Berbinais, Le Sieur Bachelier, and Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa who also echoed the Peruvian authorities' denunciation of women's indecent clothing habits and excesses. Clothing then served as a visual tool to denunciate women's behavior and to call for a reform of dressing habits in order to control women's bodies.

Chapter 8 focuses on the fear that racial fluidity produced within the upper class populations as well as colonial authorities. How different sectors of the society reacted to the urban reforms imposed by viceroy Manso is also the topic of this chapter. As Walker explains, Lima, considered by some as a black city, was indeed a physically divided city

based on racial lines. It was during religious celebrations and festivals that colonial authorities witnessed the mixing of people in one single space, blurring all racial lines that aimed to instill social order. Walker argues that the years following the earthquake represented a perilous time for colonial authorities, especially in the manner in which the indigenous population reacted to the imposition of policies which tightened tax collection through censuses and which limited Indian participation in the mendicant orders. The voice of the Franciscan friar Calixto Tupak Inca and the Indian conspiracy in El Cercado as well as Huarochiri attest to the dissatisfaction with which the indigenous people reacted to the reforms imposed after the earthquake. Walker states that “While buildings could be reconstructed, dress codes imposed, and corporate groups restrained, lingering social tensions, injustices, and contradictions could not, as became increasingly and painfully clear in the following decades, easily be patched over” (185). Finally, in the epilogue Walker recapitulates on the social, political, and religious tensions that the earthquake and tsunami uncovered. Stereotypical notions of blacks and Indians as disobedient, deceitful, prone to subversion, and dangerous became more prevalent after the earthquake as was illustrated by the reforms being imposed by colonial authorities. Fear seemed to be an evident consequence of that tension that became so vivid after the natural disaster, and deepened what the author refers to as the Lima-Andes divide. That political and social fragmentation, according to Walker, is still present today.

In sum, *Shaky Colonialism* offers a brilliant discussion into how natural disasters affect not only the psyche of the inhabitants but also the manner in which social spaces and interactions are rethought with an eye toward achieving social order and control. A critical look into the earthquake as a social phenomenon offers the opportunity to understand the political, cultural, and religious tensions, contradictions, and fears that characterized the viceregal capital at the time. The abundant archival sources discussed by Walker enable the reader to understand the multiple controversies that emerged after the earthquake as a result of the colonial authorities’ efforts to rebuild the city and to transform the moral character of the inhabitants within the tenets of the Enlightenment and the Bourbon

reforms. In this process, baroque colonialism clashed with, and subsequently gave way to, the absolutist political order of the Bourbon regime.