Recent Migration to the Peruvian Montaña

Rolf Wesche
MONTANA SETTLEMENT IN THE NATIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Peru, like other Latin American countries, has experienced massive internal migration since World War II, a process stimulated by improved transportation and communication means, increasing social mobility, cultural emancipation and concomitant rising expectations, the growing demographic pressure on traditional rural areas and the widening gulf between developing and retarded regions within the country. The 1961 census identifies 23.7% of the country's 9,907,000 inhabitants as interprovincial migrants. This figure does not take account of seasonal and occasional migration, return migrants, or movements within the individual provinces, whose areal extent is frequently considerable and may incorporate several environmental zones. If all migration had been recorded in the 1961 census at least 30% of the population would have been listed among the migrants, and there is little doubt that the percentage has since increased. The 1961 census reveals four distinct migration zones:

1) the sierra, source of heavy outmigration in urbanized and rural provinces alike;
2) the isolated bulk of Loreto and San Martin Departements equally subject to outmigration;
3) the coast whose urbanized areas absorb the largest absolute number of migrants, and;
4) the colonization frontier of the eastern slopes, border valleys and foothills of the Andes which records the highest migration gain relative to its native population among the major regions of Peru.

While attention is presently largely focused on rural-urban migration, there is evidence that rural — rural migration — to the montaña\(^1\) — is gaining in relative importance due to a constellation of conductive circumstances.

\(^{1}\) The forested area of Eastern Peru below 2,000 meters elevation.
PERU: MIGRATION BALANCE BY PROVINCE - 1961

Provinces in which the majority of district capitals are located below 2,000 meter elevation are included in the map.

Figure 1
RECENT MIGRATION TO THE PERUVIAN MONTANA

COLONIZATION ZONES OF THE WESTERN MONTÀÑA

Figure 2
Peru's cities are unable to cope adequately with the existing urban labor pool, let alone the continuing rural migrant inflow, and are facing a decade of unprecedented unemployment. To forestall massive urban degeneration the relocation of surplus population in the underpopulated Eastern lowlands must be contemplated. This can be economically justified since Peru's agricultural production, particularly in foodstuffs, is becoming increasingly deficient. The coast and the sierra hold neither sufficient reclaimable land reserves nor promise for major productivity increases to meet the challenge of the country's agricultural deficit and burgeoning population. It is being recognized that an economic threshold has been reached where new land development in the montaña is preferable to expansion on the coast or in the sierra. Maas has calculated that to satisfy assured internal demand the cultivated acreage in the montaña could be expanded from 320,000 hectares in 1965 to 1,280,000 hectares in 1975, generating a livelihood for 250,000 persons. Another estimate, which does not consider market availability, states that the montaña contains sufficient land resources to accommodate an additional agricultural population of over 8 million, while providing full employment for its labor component (see table 1).

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Labor force in 1965</th>
<th>Actual labor demand in 1965 *</th>
<th>Potential labor demand **</th>
<th>Rural population in 1965</th>
<th>Potential rural population **</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perú</td>
<td>1,719,200</td>
<td>801,300</td>
<td>3,886,000</td>
<td>5,969,000</td>
<td>13,457,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coast</td>
<td>280,900</td>
<td>253,100</td>
<td>520,000</td>
<td>975,000</td>
<td>1,808,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra</td>
<td>1,224,300</td>
<td>446,000</td>
<td>784,000</td>
<td>4,251,000</td>
<td>2,719,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montaña</td>
<td>214,000</td>
<td>102,200</td>
<td>2,582,000</td>
<td>743,000</td>
<td>8,929,700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Assuming existing land use and technology.

** Assuming most intensive possible use of all suitable land with present technology.


There is no doubt that colonization of the montaña on an unprecedented scale is now feasible. Diseases and pests affecting man, animals and plants

---


are increasingly controlled. Local diet is being improved through diversification of crop agriculture and expansion of domestic animal raising. Government agencies and other public institutions, particularly SIPA (Servicio de Investigación y Promoción Agraria)\(^4\), as well as private corporations and entrepreneurs have laid the groundwork of modern rainforest agriculture since World War II. Plough agriculture is now successfully practiced in the hinterlands of Tarapoto, Tingo María-Tocache and the Valle de la Convención, and mechanized forest clearing has been widely adopted in the Pucallpa area. Rudiments of infrastructure, particularly elementary schools and government medical posts are in existence.

Most importantly a dozen penetration roads now connect choice lowland areas suited for colonization with the sierra and the coast. The stage is thus set for the shift from penetration road to colonization road construction. The latter would open fertile border valleys and piedmont zones and tie them to the penetration roads, thus leading to the pay-off of the costly and in themselves relatively unproductive penetration roads. The beginning of a new era of mass-colonization manifested itself in Belaúnde Terry’s «Carretera Marginal de la Selva» a system of colonization roads rather than the international artery as which it was popularly conceived and came under attack. Though Belaúnde’s heavy commitment of national resources to montaña development contributed to his downfall, no Peruvian government can turn its back to the montaña in view of investments already made, and the progress and momentum which has been achieved.

EXTENT AND CHARACTER OF COLONIZATION

The need for opening more land for colonization is underlined by the extent to which migrants have responded to settlement opportunities in the past. Wherever roads have been advanced, spontaneous migration has ensued. In fact, new settlement has generally anticipated or accompanied road construction rather than following in the wake of already established arteries. Thus, all existing penetration and feeder roads as well as navigable rivers which form their functional extensions are lined with settlement.

No simple correlation between ease of market access and extent of settlement is apparent. The fact that the Chanchamayo-Oxapampa zone, which has the best road link to Lima of all colonization areas, is the most populous, and that the hinterlands of the major commercial arteries to Tingo María-Pucallpa and Baga-Nazareth are attracting massive immigration, would suggest such a relationship. However, a comparison between the Satipo and Apurímac roads, which were completed at approximately the same time, the former providing relatively easy access to major sierran markets and Lima, the latter connecting to one of the most backward and overpopulated sierran zones, reveals that the Apurímac road had a greater impact on migration.

---

\(^4\) Formerly SCIPA (Servicio Inter-Americano de Producción de Alimentos).
while producing a much less significant expansion of cultivated acreage\(^5\). Furthermore, the hinterland of Sandia (Tambopata, Valle Pucaramayo, Valle Grande) in the overpopulated Department of Puno evolved as one of the most populous colonization zones even before the advent of road transporta-

tion.

These and other examples permit the generalization that both economic opportunity and demographic pressure motivate montaña settlement. While the former factor clearly predominates in the northern montaña the latter is of at least equal importance in the areas adjacent to the overpopulated and underdeveloped southern sierra. One can equally generalize that colonization areas which appear less attractive to the modern farmer in terms of terrain, accessibility, and scope for large scale commercialization tend to have higher population densities than those most suited for modern development. Choice areas attract, in fact are largely monopolized, by more progressive white and mestizo settlers, who tend to seek larger properties and to practice capital intensive exploitation as well as speculative land acquisition\(^6\). These conditions are not conducive to permanent settlement of high density, but rather encourage reliance on seasonal highland labor. Furthermore, the ingress of small farmers into the interior is impeded once road frontage is occupied in larger properties and speculative claims. By contrast, less desirable areas remain the domain of the small farmer — Indian and mestizo — and are characterized by rudimentary technology and a strong subsistence component. These areas are populated in a process of indiscriminate spill-over from overcrowded sierran areas into adjacent montaña zones. High population density and small scale farming is encouraged by lack of private capital and government support. There is little incentive to choose penetration into even more remote locations over subdivision of land in established areas as long as subsistence is assured.

**TYPES OF MIGRATION**

Three distinct types of migration to the montaña can be identified:
1) seasonal labor migration, 2) suitcase farming\(^7\), and 3) permanent relocation.

---

5 McLEAN, R.T., *Los efectos de dos carreteras de penetración recientemente terminadas en el Perú*, Princeton, 1969, p. 111. The Satipo road, first opened in 1940 and destroyed by an earthquake in 1947, was reopened in 1962, causing immigration of 13 000 persons from 1955 to 1965 and the clearing of 16 000 hectares. The Apurimac road was completed in 1964 and attracted 16 000 persons from 1959 to 1965 while adding only 4 000 hectares of cleared land.

6 Though speculative land taking has been restrained in the 1960's by government regulations which tie ownership to effective land use, it still constitutes a problem in areas where government control is less than effective.

7 In the Peruvian context the term denotes operation of one or a number of agricultural plots sufficiently removed from the principal landholding and place of residence of the operator to necessitate maintenance of a second dwelling.
Types 1 and 2 are largely confined to highland Indians of rural background. The third type involves all ethnic groups, and while involving migrants of rural origin primarily, has recently attracted increasing numbers from urban areas. While the types are distinct enough to be readily identified no claim is made for clear definability or mutual exclusiveness. Rather it is recognized that in many cases types 1 and 2 are transitional stages in a process leading to type 3, that combinations of types 1 and 2 are frequent, and that type 3 does not necessarily exclude retention of property in the area of the migrants’ origin.

*Seasonal labor migration*

Highland Indians have made the conquest of the montaña possible with their seasonal labor. Attracted by comparatively high wages, the promised use of a subsistence plot, or a share in the harvest, and frequently enlisted by *enganchadores* (professional recruiters) they still play a significant role. This type of migration generally involves only male labor, through female dependents may appear occasionally for short term visits.

The Indian’s preference for this type of temporary arrangement over permanent settlement has traditionally been attributed to his inability to adjust to the montaña environment. The hypothesis of physical adjustment problems has since been largely discredited. The potency of cultural constraints attaching him to his sierran place of origin is put in doubt by the considerable geographical mobility of the Indians and their effective integration, in large numbers, into coastal urban life. One thus wonders whether the Indian’s traditional lack of permanence in the montaña is not rather primarily attributable to economic and social factors which have affected him more adversely than his white and mestizo counterparts.

As mentioned previously the Indian has, in the majority of cases, been effectively barred from the most desirable montaña lands by large land owners who had more foresight, capital and political connections. The less accessible or environmentally marginal fringe zones whose lack of means of communication and basic services compared unfavorably with those available in the highlands were singularly unattractive. Since the Indian’s lack of resources under such conditions would have permitted nothing better than mere subsistence there was to him no economic justification for montaña settlement, at least until recent population growth began to put the possibility of highland subsistence in question. Furthermore, attachment to highland haciendas made anything other than temporary absence an impossibility for large numbers of Indians. Nevertheless one of the basic aspirations of seasonal migrants has always been to acquire their own plot of land.

---

While the seasonal labor phenomenon was once identified with montaña development in large estates it is now equally associated with the increasingly numerous medium and small holdings which sprang up as montaña infrastructure improved. These normally require additional labor due to their low capitalization. Indian landholders are furthermore under social pressure to receive relatives and acquaintances from their home communities. This diversification of seasonal migration has increased the likelihood of eventual permanent settlement for the migrants involved. The chances for acquisition of land in areas of small and medium holdings are better and the social context more amenable, particularly in areas of homogeneous Indian settlement. Friends and relatives are furthermore prepared to assist in the identification of free land, even to share their own land claims. Thus seasonal labor in many cases serves as an apprenticeship toward eventual permanent settlement.

Suitcase farming

A much older form of montaña migration is carried on by highland farmers who supplement their diet and/or income by cultivating crops unsuited to the sierra on one or a number of plots which they control in the montaña. The suitcase farming practice dates back at least to Incaic times when coca was the most prized montaña crop and has been described as a well established tradition among Indian communities of Huánuco 9 and Cuzco 10 departments.

During the 1950's and 1960's the development of the Tambopata into one of the principal coffee-producing areas of the country has been achieved in similar fashion 11. Indians from the Puno altiplano migrated to the area in large numbers for two decades preceding the arrival of a road in 1965. Since transportation was, and in the greater part of the Tambopata still is, confined to muletrains, coffee was the only commercially feasible product and has retained its absolute dominance. Since absence of infrastructure would have permitted nothing better than subsistence for permanent settlers, most Tambopata pioneers opted wisely for making the best of two worlds. They appear briefly between December and February for the cultivation and weeding of the coffee plantings, and again for the prolonged harvest season from May to July when crop agricultural activity in the southern sierra is at a standstill. The sierra provides them with a reasonably balanced subsistence, the montaña with the cash crop. Since the seasonality of work requirements of highland and coffee agriculture are complementary, use of available man-

---

power and derived income are maximized. The extent of coffee plantings can be adjusted to the manpower surplus available as well as to fluctuations of the coffee market. As women and children remain in the highlands, tending fields and livestock, and with access to schools and medical facilities, adjustment problems are minimal. Housing facilities in the Tambopata are rudimentary. Subsistence cropping is neglected and migrants bring with them the more important food staples.

Interim maintenance of both highland and lowland plots increasingly serves to smooth the transition toward permanent settlement in the lowlands. In the Tambopata the transitional process may lead from short-term visits during the stage of forest clearing, coffee planting and initial cultivation, to prolonged stays when coffee plantings begin significant production (after approximately four years), and ultimately to permanent settlement when plantings and production have reached sufficient magnitude to provide an adequate livelihood for the family. The long transition period also allows time for the establishment of the infrastructure and services essential to permanent settlement, which in the case of the Tambopata now include a penetration road, sanitary post, secondary school, primary schools and cooperatives.

In other colonization areas as well Indian small farmers frequently maintain their highland base at least until subsistence crops on their lowland holdings begin to produce and often until they are satisfied that commercial products from their plantings can be adequately marketed and that the government has demonstrated its commitment to the area concerned by beginning the development of infrastructure. A similar flexible approach is generally adopted by speculative so-called « agricultural societies » or « cooperatives », usually constituted of city dwelling mestizos, which consider settlement or sale once a road has reached their land claim.

**Permanent settlement**

Permanent settlement in the montaña is preferred by most migrants as their ultimate goal, and furthermore appears to be a widespread aspiration in rural areas of sierran departments which through trade or migration maintain contacts with the montaña. Since the pioneer fringe is terra incognita, however, decisions concerning permanence of settlement are frequently made only after familiarization with the area. Complete initial relocation is thus not the predominant form of colonization in those areas of spontaneous settlement of the upper montaña which have relatively easy access to sierran

---

12 In a survey of 532 heads of households, conducted by the Sociology Department of the Universidad Agraria Nacional La Molina in the sierran community of Chacán, near Cuzco, 26% responded affirmatively to the question, « If you were granted an ample lot in the selva of La Convención, would you go to live there? » Quoted in CRAIG, Wesley, Jr., *Migración de la Sierra hacia la ceja de selva : Estudio del Valle de la Convención*, Lima, n.d., p. 33.
zones of migrant origin. It is commoner in more remote areas of the montaña, particularly the selva baja, where the high cost of transport to the sierra relative to the financial resources of the migrant enforces an immediate commitment to permanent settlement. Many migrants who have sold properties in the sierra to finance the move to the montaña and who exhaust their means in the process of relocation find that economic circumstances bar the possibility of return to the sierra.

Improved infrastructure and services in many parts of the montaña have in the recent past made permanent relocation increasingly attractive. This trend is enforced by the requirement for permanent settlement in government colonization projects, improved tenure security in small holdings, and increasing enforcement of land clearing and cultivation requirements as the basis for granting tenure.

Indian migration to the montaña originates primarily in rural areas of the Southeastern and East-central sierra, specifically those which combine easy access to the montaña and poor connections to the coast with strong population pressure. Large areas of the Western sierra have been almost unaffected by the process. Most migration of Indians occurs within individual departments or between adjacent departments. Within the Eastern sierra distinct clustering of points of migrant origin can be observed. Immediate hinterlands of penetration roads are obviously favored while areas in which land tenure is dominated by haciendas restrict mobility. Select communities stand out as areas of outmigration to an extent which neither location nor economic and demographic conditions can fully explain. Rather they are manifestations of a local migration tradition which is perpetuated by the personal examples and verbal accounts of previous migrants who maintain contact with their socially tight-knit home communities. Since Indian migrants frequently aspire to improve their social status in the home community through investments of montaña earnings in local property, conspicuous consumption and contributions to fiestas, as well as exaggeration of their achievements in the montaña, the temptation for other villagers to follow their example is great.

The choice of colonization area is also strongly influenced among this group by preceding migration rather than by distribution of economic opportunity, since both newcomers and established colonists seek security by surrounding themselves with conocidos (long-time acquaintances) on whom they rely for mutual support and social intercourse in an alien environment. This results in a certain degree of spatial segregation according to settler origin, and leads to prominence of migrants from a limited number of

---

13 The principal government colonization projects are located in the Chiriyacu — Nazareth, Tingo María — Tocache, and Apurímac areas.

communities in the individual colonization zones. Aymara colonists from Moho and Conima on the north shore of Lake Titicaca, for example, constitute 50% of migrants to the Tambopata, where their settlements are separated from those of Quechuas from Putina and Chupa who constitute another 15% of the local population.

Short distance migration and the clustering effects described are also characteristic of some backward rural, mestizo communities in the northern sierra, particularly in the department of Cajamarca. Generally, however, migration of mestizos and whites is characterized by greater diversity of points of origin and occupational as well as economic backgrounds. Distribution of economic opportunity rather than proximity dominates their selection of settlement location, a distinct preference being shown for the Satipo, Chan-chamayo-Oxapampa, Tingo María-Pucallpa, and Bagua-Nazareth zones, particularly for the government colonization schemes. Compared to the somewhat distorted and regionally confined spatial perception of the Indians, whites and mestizos frequently have a truly national spatial concepts and generally profess firsthand knowledge of more than one colonization zone.

It appears that modernization of education and means of communication, increasing government involvement in the montaña and resulting publicity, as well as growing unemployment in other areas will inevitably lead to an expansion of the hinterlands from which the individual colonization areas draw new settlers. This trend is already evident in the Tingo María-Tocache area, presently the most dynamic of the colonization zones. Until the early 1960’s almost all settlers in this area originated from the marginal populations of the contiguous departments of Túñuco and San Martín. This situation changed dramatically with the rapid advancement of the local sector of the Carretera Marginal and development of a capital-intensive government colonization scheme since 1964. One now finds among the settlers a hundred-member cooperative of former cotton sharecroppers from Piura, Japanese-Peruvian businessmen, former taxi-drivers and industrial laborers from Lima, and graduates of « colegios agrónomos » from various parts of the country. An increasing number of migrants from major urban centers suggests that the seductive lights of the city which promise more than they can deliver may find competition in frontier areas offering reasonable economic opportunity.

Although migration to the montaña is the object of this study, at least passing reference must be made to migration flows within and out of the area. Figure 1 illustrates that a large area of the montaña has a negative migration balance. The outflow from the isolated riverine eastern montaña to the colonization fringe in the western montaña accompanies a major economic reorientation from the areas of the Atlantic amazonic outlet to western road-head centers of commerce. This is manifest in the recent upsurge of Pucallpa at the expense of Iquitos. A significant flow of migrants is also directed from the eastern montaña to coastal centers.
ORIGIN OF 3,780 TAMBOPATA SETTLERS - 1949 - 1969

Figure 3
Figure 4
Figure 5
Within the western montaña the department of San Martín stands out as the only area of predominant out-migration. This distinction is attributable to the absence of road links to the sierra and the coast and a considerable local population density derived from settlement during the late Incaic or early colonial period as well as the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when roads were still unknown in the montaña. Presently the out-migration tide from San Martín is in the process of being reversed due to extension of the Carretera Marginal, which before the close of the decade will provide connections both to Tingo María-Lima and to the north coast.

More localized movements from established colonization zones to their pioneer fringes are universal, involving not only the second generation of settlers but also original migrants who find that their holdings are insufficient in view of growing families and rising expectations. A 1964-1966 survey conducted by the Oficina Nacional de Reforma Agraria in the Valle de la Convención discovered that 10% of the local settlers has acquired a second lot in the downriver pioneer fringe.

Lastly, a sizable outflow from the western montaña to the coast and to a lesser extent to sierran centers must be noted, which only in part is accounted for by migrants who fail to adjust and prosper in the montaña. It equally reveals a widespread concept of the montaña as a stepping-stone in the long-term process of social and economic upward mobility which may ultimately lead to coastal or sierran cities, a concept which will not die while the montaña remains backward in terms of modern facilities and urban development.

Seasonal migrants and suitcase farmers generally enter into contact with the montaña in pursuit of earnings to be invested in the sierra, and even when establishing permanent settlement, frequently retain the aspiration to retire in their areas of origin. The more progressive permanent settlers, themselves prepared to face the hardships of pioneer colonization for lack of more attractive alternatives, see the future of their children in terms of education and urban employment, neither of which the montaña can adequately provide.

Seen in this light, not only the massive immigration to the montaña but also part of the outmigration from the area attests to the vigorous role which the montaña frontier already plays in the country's economic development. Past migration response to new settlement opportunities, the large number of visitors in search of land which one encounters throughout the Western montaña, and the distinct trend toward permanent settlement leave no doubt that the momentum of montaña development will increase as the government commits greater resources to the provision of roads, medical and education facilities, extension and credit services, while promoting an agrarian reform which favors the small land owner. One of the most striking features of future montaña development will be the massive involvement of highland Indians for whom the montaña offers a brighter future for upward mobility than is available to them in urban centers.
ABSTRACT

RECENT MIGRATION TO THE PERUVIAN MONTANA

Past migration, as well as the need and opportunities for future migration to the montaña are discussed in the context of Peru’s economic and demographic development. Correlations between extent and spatial pattern of migration, and economic opportunity as well as absorptive capacity of frontier zones are examined. Seasonal migration, suitcase farming, and permanent relocation are analyzed with respect to existing interrelationships and the cultural and economic factors which condition them.

Unsatisfactory migration performance of highland Indians is attributed to inadequate land tenure organization and deficient government services in the montaña rather than cultural impediments to which this phenomenon has traditionally been attributed. Migration response to existing settlement opportunity is considered encouraging and indicative of a significant migration potential if specific obstacles to highland Indian settlement can be removed.

RÉSUMÉ

MIGRATIONS RÉCENTES VERS LE MONTANA PÉRUVIEN

Les migrations passées, ainsi que le besoin et l’opportunité de migrations futures vers le Montaña, sont examinées dans le contexte du développement économique et démographique du Pérou. Les corrélations entre l’extension et le réseau spatial des migrations, les ressources économiques et la capacité d’absorption du front pionnier sont examinées. Les migrations saisonnières, l’agriculture de subsistance et la relocalisation permanente sont analysées, en rapport avec les interrelations et les facteurs culturels et économiques qui les conditionnent.

La médiocrité des résultats de la migration des Indiens des hautes terres est attribuée à l’organisation inadéquate de la distribution des terres et à la déficience des services gouvernementaux dans le Montaña, plutôt qu’à des obstacles culturels que l’on invoque traditionnellement. Le résultat des migrations par rapport aux facilités actuelles d’installation, est considéré comme encourageant et indicateur d’un potentiel migratoire important si les obstacles spécifiques à l’installation des Indiens des hautes terres peuvent être éliminés.

RESUMEN

RECENTE MIGRACION A LA MONTANA

Anteriores migraciones, así como la necesidad y oportunidad de una futura migración a la montaña son enfocada en el contexto del desarrollo económico y demográfico del Peru. Han sido examinadas la correlación entre la magnitud y contexto espacial de migración y la oportunidad económica así como la capacidad de incorporación en las zones fronterizas. La migración temporal, el «suitcase farming», y la reubicación permanente son analizados con relación a las interrelaciones existentes y los factores culturales y económicos que los condicionan.

La migración poco satisfactoria de los indios del Altiplano se debe a la inadecuada organización de la tenencia de tierras y a los servicios deficientes del gobierno en la región de la montaña más que a impedimentos culturales como tradicionalmente se cree. La reacción del indio ante la oportunidad de colonizar se considera estimulante e indicativa de un significante potencial de migración, siempre y cuando se puedan eliminar ciertos obstáculos que impiden la colonización de indios del Altiplano.