

Antonio Raimondi's Cartographies for Progress

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In the second half of the nineteenth century, Italian naturalist Antonio Raimondi embarked on a scientific project to explore and describe Peru's territory, resulting in an extensive archive and the publication of the **Map of Peru** (1887-1897). Following similar enterprises across the Americas, the map—comprised of thirty-two sheets—is considered the first detailed cartography of Peru after its independence from Spain in 1821.

During a project of “modernization” and economic expansion led by a governing white elite, his map operated as an “index for extraction” by locating mines, railways, waterways, and ports that reimagined the Andes and the Amazon as extractive sites. Supported by detailed descriptions and carefully composed drawings, Raimondi constructed an image of rich territories filled with natural resources capable of sustaining Peru's development. Furthermore, he built a rhetoric that erased or rendered primitive indigenous communities while elevating the achievements and presence of “industrious Europeans,” promoting settler colonialism, agricultural and mining estates, and infrastructure for commerce. At a critical moment in the nation-building process, Raimondi's map and scientific project materially transformed landscapes and associated them to a national political identity, with effects that persist today manifested in multiple social-environmental conflicts.

In contrast, indigenous communities in the Andes and Amazon describe the territory as a network of relations where human and other-than-human subjects interact, reproducing forms of sociality and conviviality. Captured in oral history, artifacts, and visual representations, these counter-cartographies complicate the “view from above” of the map. This paper derives from ongoing research and archival work, which explores Raimondi's cartographies for territorial domination versus indigenous forms of perception. By bringing together architecture, decolonial studies, and anthropology, it unpacks the biopolitical and ecological implications of Raimondi's **Map of Peru** while contesting the neocolonial nature of his project by bringing forward otherwise obscured forms of indigenous cartographic knowledge.