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The Strategic Importance of Enlightenment and Skill for Power¹

Henry F. Dobyns²



THIS PAPER HIGHLIGHTS the effects of enlightenment and skills upon power, rather than presenting a systematic and complete discussion of their relations. Illustrations are drawn from the Vicos experience.

Enlightenment and skill were always strategic for power under the traditional manor system in the central Andean region. Using the term *manor* implies a social structure of clearcut social dominance of a few individuals over many others. The general power characteristics of manors are historically well-known.³ What may be less well-known are other and important characteristics of the manorial system.

In the first place, the traditional manor system of the Andes cuts off serf populations from sources of knowledge and innovation.⁴ Each manor is maintained as more or less a spatial, social, and psychological isolate with respect to modern Western Civilization.⁵ Each manor resembles rather closely those independent landholding peasant communities Wolf⁶ labels "corporate," except that manor serfs lack "jurisdiction over the free disposal of land" which the manor owner or his representative controls, and the fact that manors typically occupy relatively good rather than marginal land.

Each manor serf population is reduced to dependence upon its own store of traditional knowledge, and typically displays the same "defensive ignorance" or "active denial of outside alternative" that characterizes the corporate peasant community.⁷ Parents resist sending children—useful field hands and shepherds—to school, especially when prejudiced Mestizo teachers discipline them with corporal punishment, assign them menial tasks, etc. This means that the society of manor serfs remains quite small in scale,⁸ and has little chance to accumulate ideas so that it necessarily remains relatively stable.⁹ For serf knowledge is augmented only occasionally by such small increments as the overlord may decide to force upon the closed society of the manor. Serf farming is customary husbandry as it was historically in Europe. Land is exploited as in the corporate peasant community by means of a *traditional technology* requiring much manual labor, and serf plots are typically assigned on the more marginally productive steeper slopes within any given manor. Hard work and thrift and conformity to local "Indian" patterns of dress and behavior are extolled, while sloth and greed are viewed as vices,¹⁰ just as in the corporate peasant community. "Institutionalized envy" constitutes, moreover, an important mechanism of social control in the manor population as in the peasant populace.

The exception to this description is the patronal institution that dominates the manor serfs. The overlord is, as part of his role as the most powerful single individual connected with a traditional Andean manor, the person in this interaction system who enjoys the greatest access to national educational facilities outside the manor. Historic Andean society is one in which acquiring knowledge is the privilege of a few persons selected either formally or indirectly for economic reasons or by inheritance in terms of a fundamental assumption that Indians are different in kind from Europeans.

After the overlord, his Mestizo overseers are those individuals connected with the traditional manor who enjoy greatest access to formal education, although they cannot



In the photograph above, Mardell Leyva, assisting a Peace Corps Volunteer teacher school, instructs a young Vicos student. Left, a young Vicos matron uses a community sewing machine to embroider a new cape.

expect the same quality education as that obtained by the typical overlord.

The serfs are in general excluded from the formal education system unless and until the overlord decides to permit them access to it. It bears repeating that the introduction of a government-financed public school into Vicos occurred originally more to provide a paid job for a relative than to furnish effective education to children of serfs. Between its foundation in 1940 and 1951, this school enrolled a total of thirty-nine students, or three per cent of the Vicos population aged seven and over at the beginning of 1952. Only five inhabitants of Vicos could read or write in 1951, and that very poorly. Only two per cent could even speak the major trade language of Peru, Spanish.¹¹ Only four per cent of the school-age children in 1952 attended school in 1951.

Thus the overlord and sometimes his overseers are the only persons connected with the traditional manor whose exposure to world culture is usually sufficient to permit any one of them to achieve that concentration of ideas that Barnett sees as necessary for innovation. The superior enlightenment of the overlord has been directed historically, however, not toward innovation, but toward maintaining the power domain¹² of each overlord over his particular serfs.

Such small amounts of power as are not held by the overlord are tied into a political-religious system involving adult males who achieve power in it by group decision as in the corporate peasant community. In the manor as in the corporate peasant community, this traditional political-religious system based on medieval Spanish models defines the boundaries of the manor population, and serves as a symbol of such unity as may exist among the serfs.

Participant Intervention

When the Cornell Peru Project undertook to dismantle the patronal institution and distribute among the serfs of Vicos the control of its power domain, the strategic importance of enlightenment for power was amply and repeatedly demonstrated. The Cornell Peru Project explicitly took into account the proposition that cultural freedom exists only for those citizens who can elect one or another cultural alternative on a basis of adequate knowledge and comprehension of them. Observing that such understanding is obtained largely by a process of formal education in contemporary Western Civilization,¹³ the Cornell Peru Project set out effectively to introduce the national formal education system to Vicos with the goal of achieving eventual complete literacy.

The formal structuring of the Cornell Peru Project itself reflected the enlightenment and skill in human relations of its founders. They correctly predicted that the Vicos power domain could be materially altered only by bringing it within a larger power domain. In this case, the national government approved the formation of a binational power domain constituted by Cornell University and (initially) the Peruvian Indian Institute. The Director and Co-Director turned their personal knowledge and

the respect accorded them for it to wider account¹⁴ in incorporating provincial power domains such as those of Mestizo trading-town merchants into the larger power domain of the Cornell Peru Project and Peruvian National Plan for Integrating the Aboriginal Population, which coordinates the local efforts of numerous government entities.¹⁵ In the process of assisting Vicos toward "a position of relative independence and freedom within the larger framework of Peruvian national life,"¹⁶ the Cornell Peru Project has established a spatially large, although relatively weak, power domain in the Peruvian nation through mass media diffusion of reports of its practical successes.

The series of specific innovations the Cornell Peru Project introduced to the Vicos population was drawn simply from the wide range of intellectual and technical knowledge at the command of the members of the Cornell Peru Project that had hitherto not been communicated in any way to the serfs of the former manor.

When Dr. Vazquez undertook to convey to seventeen Indian near-subsistence farmers technical agricultural ideas that enabled sixteen of them to raise large potato crops, he and other members of the Cornell Peru Project drew these technological concepts from the great fund of experimentally accumulated knowledge available to them. They were not at all experienced farmers.

When Professor Holmberg undertook to create full-time artisans in Vicos where no full-time non-farming specialists had existed prior to 1952, he hired journeymen building trades specialists to instruct their Indian helpers while they erected new buildings to house Cornell Peru Project personnel and activities, school pupils and teachers, etc.

When Dr. Vazquez and the author undertook to interest Vicos women—nearly completely shut off from the formal educational process by local values—in household-oriented formal instruction, they recruited a bilingual seamstress to begin teaching sewing in 1960.

Each of these Cornell Peru Project actions based upon concentrated knowledge of the accumulated store of cultural traits termed Western Civilization created a temporary power domain of greater or lesser duration under the control of the designated instructor. It must be emphasized that in no case was Indian attendance at public school or adult education classes compulsory. Even army service has been voluntary, at least in the sense that Vicos youths were persuaded by Dr. Vazquez not only to cease fleeing but actually to present themselves to the draft authorities. Each power domain established by an outside instructor came into temporary being because the enlightenment of the instructor attracted would-be emulators from among the Indian population. Thus each instructional power domain resulted directly from enlightenment and skill, which commanded the respect of potential and actual students. Since no severe deprivations could be employed by teachers against their potential pupils (except in the army) the power wielded by them appears to be the influencing type envisioned by Russell,¹⁷ Tawney,¹⁸ Parsons,¹⁹ and by Cartwright.²⁰

The Cornell Peru Project did establish other power domains from its pinnacle of authority as temporary overlord. While all forms of extra, unpaid serf labor (*pongaje*) were promptly abolished as the most irksome manor exactions discovered by scientific interviewing, the basic three-day per week field labor obligation was retained during the transitional period. Thus field hands who learned the elements of modern potato growing on the manor's commercial fields under the supervision of the overseers did not do so voluntarily. Nor did the workers who erected the first new school buildings volunteer for the task; it was assigned to them as part of their obligatory labor. Most important of all, the local Indian field bosses (*mayorales*) who were trained in democratic discussion and decision-making in weekly seminars conducted by the Cornell Peru Project staff did not voluntarily attend those seminars in the beginning, even though a very high proportion of the Project field director's time and skill was devoted to converting these into enlightening sessions focusing attention on "all versions of reality, all value demands and all the identifications" relevant to the social process, according to Lasswell.

In these cases, the power wielded by the Cornell Peru Project was the type backed up by severe deprivations for non-conformity as discussed by Laswell and Kaplan and Bierstedt.²¹

Literacy and Family Power

The Cornell Peru Project goal of building the national school system of Peru into the emerging Vicos community in such a way as to insure its functioning as an effective contact institution²² has been achieved. This is not to say that the Vicos population is already an entirely formally educated one. Far from it. By 1963, only eighteen per cent of the Vicos population aged seven or more had ever attended school. Only seventeen per cent in this age category spoke Spanish. Only thirty-five per cent of the school age population was enrolled in school in 1959 (seventy-six per cent of school age boys but only six per cent of school age girls).²³ Although the process of formal education must continue for many years in order to make all Vicos inhabitants literate, the public school institution has been firmly established as a principal contact institution. The integration of formal enlightenment in Vicos was signaled by a parental lockout in 1961 aimed at forcing an improvement in the teaching staff. The incident demonstrated the internalization in Vicos of the enlightenment value.

As the Cornell Peru Project provided opportunities for the acquisition of skills and for enlightenment not formerly possible for Vicos residents, those who voluntarily became more skilled or more enlightened promptly began structuring new power domains of their own that clearly rest upon the foundation of their relatively greater skill or enlightenment. That enlightenment brings power over the unenlightened has, of course, been postulated by political analysts from Bacon to Bakunin and Machajski and more recent Marxists.²⁴ Many Vicos examples might be given, but a few illustrations must suffice here.

First, the near-subsistence farmers who learned modern potato growing technology from Dr. Vazquez and later from technicians of the Peruvian government's supervised credit program contributed to making the newly self-governing community of Vicos itself a functional power domain. The augmented production that brought economic independence which permitted a measure of political liberty and social freedom from traditional restrictions and some diminution of customary discriminations was achieved by the application of farming skills learned from outsiders.

Second, the handful of artisans who really learned basic building trades well carried the Vicos population a long step along the road toward a social system based upon social contract rather than ascribed statuses. Contracts had existed in Vicos prior to 1951, to be sure. Individuals who needed the local *poncho* contracted with a part-time specialist in weaving to make the garment. Agricultural tasks and house construction were carried out, on the other hand, by reciprocal labor-exchange institutions called *minka*. One good reason for erecting houses with large gangs of laborers provisioned with food and drink by the house-builder was that no building trades specialists existed in the Vicos population who were notably more proficient than any other near-subsistence farmer-serf.

With the training of a number of specialists on Cornell Peru Project building programs, this situation changed. Masons and carpenters with a considerable degree of technical competence emerged, although they continued to farm and carried on their specialties only part-time. The difference between their technical competence and their efficiency as a result of it became readily apparent to their peers. As a consequence, when community authorities had to build new or repair existing structures, they began to contract with these specialists instead of organizing a *minka*. They found that the specialist-constructed building cost less than the one put up by less-skilled, intoxicated *minka* laborers, and endured better, as well as being more aesthetically pleasing (the walls did not lean). Thus the new artisans built up small power domains in the building construction field in Vicos. As they practiced their trades, these men perfected their skills and acquired some reputation. One native Vicos plasterer has worked in recent years on buildings in neighboring Chancos and the Mestizo towns of Pariahuanca and Carhuaz as well as the capital city of the department, Huaraz. A Vicos carpenter goes to work for months at a time in towns on the Andean western slope, taking two sons as helpers.

Third, the diffusion of literacy and the ability to speak Spanish through the public school and adult literacy classes greatly enlarged by the Cornell Peru Project, with regard to physical plant, and the Ministry of Education, with regard to teaching staff, has led to establishment of new power domains of several sorts.

One consequence of such enlightenment is a considerable alteration of roles within the power domain of the family. As Vicos families have acquired literate, Spanish-speaking sons, these have been assigned new responsibilities. With the passage of time and observance of many

demonstrations of the social and economic advantages educated boys enjoy, family after Vicos family has come to place more and more confidence in its educated representatives.

Now wealthy stock-owning or potato-growing grandfathers whose decisions were absolute under traditional manor conditions make no significant economic moves without consulting their educated grandsons, frequently following their advice. Mere striplings find themselves with heady decision-making power. For quite naturally, the formally-educated, bilingual youths have not been slow to realize that their command of Quechua and Spanish gives them tremendous advantages over their own kinsmen, and particularly over their own parents and grandparents who remain monolingual and frightened of the still-strange Mestizo world. While seventeen per cent of the Vicos population could speak Spanish by 1963, this skill is largely restricted still to younger men and boys who have attended school or adult literacy classes or served in the Peruvian army.

Thus a stable system of interpersonal relationships in a family structure formally ruled by male elders for at least 400 years has been turned topsy-turvy within little more than one decade. This singular situation supports Mead's observation²⁵ that rapid change is possible, and Beaglehole's proposition²⁶ that social change can occur with great rapidity when new procedures "offer a welcome release from a crippling traditional system." The kind of Indian personality produced by the manor system leaves little doubt that the traditional social system of the manor in Vicos was a psychologically crippling one. The existing condition of interpersonal relations within Vicos families calls into question a Wallace²⁷ claim that no cultural form that is not congenial to the personality structure of a group can be introduced to its members within a single generation. If the modal Vicos personality was as despairing as it appears to have been, then the present fairly ebullient, optimistic community leaders and dominant young family members, who were born and weaned under the traditional manor system, certainly seem to disprove the Wallace dictum.

The rapid rise to power by comparative youngsters in Vicos families under these special circumstances of differential enlightenment also helps us to see that many of the attributes of power attributed to family heads are not inherent. The traditional Vicos family resembled the Navajo, Mormon²⁸ and Detroit²⁹ urban family in that wives and husbands made decisions. The powers of the Vicos parent appear to derive from a relatively greater degree of enlightenment and skill in a simply organized social system, in which learning comes from experience rather than instruction. Present-day social flux in Vicos shows that the power of parents under the traditional manorial system derived from cumulative knowledge about how the system worked, and from skill in playing upon the emotions of the overlord in order to gain competitive advantages over other serfs. With the abolition of the traditional system in Vicos and the increasing integration of its former serf population into Peruvian na-

tional society, the functional utility of the traditional form of enlightenment and the traditional skills diminished. In their stead, the new skills of literacy, democratic discussion and decision-making have acquired such great functional value that their possessors have come to dominate their families, in many cases regardless of their relatively tender age, lack of traditional attributes of maturity such as spouses and offspring, and traditional norms of respect by youths toward elders, etc.

There exists, then, what should be a temporary situation in Vicos, if the entire adult population becomes literate at some future date. The present Vicos condition approximates the customary state of affairs in a number of simply organized social systems in which power clearly does not reside in the eldest family member, but in the most efficient economic producer. This usually is the most enlightened and skilled individual in terms of the particular requirements of the group's economic system. Among the Siriono, for example, such power as is wielded gravitates to those individuals whose enlightenment as to the habits of Amazon Basin wildlife, and skills in making and using native weapons and tools, permit them consistently to provide more food than other individuals.³⁰

New Power Domains

Other power domains that newly literate Vicos youths are establishing affect individuals outside their immediate families in ways unknown under the traditional manor system.

After the Cornell Peru Project five-year period of direct responsibility for administering the Vicos estate terminated and the former serfs took over responsibility for directing their own affairs, they decided to conduct a community farm enterprise. This business venture is carried out on the same fields that once were farmed by serf labor to the profit of the overlord. It is sustained by a labor tax that resembles the obligatory labor system of the traditional manor. One fundamental principle of collecting this labor tax is that it must be equitable. That is to say that no individual is to be taxed more nor less than any other.

Achieving this ideal in practice has led to the establishment of a kind of power domain based entirely on the literacy of key individuals rather than upon traditional criteria of power.

The Vicos community council soon decided to make each councilman responsible for supervising the workers from the zone which elected him. This made the delegates responsible for administering the labor tax equally among their own constituents. The latter were quick to point out to their elected delegates, if the latter did not already realize it, that carrying out the ideal of equal taxation in the fields over the period of an agricultural season required keeping accurate records of the days worked by each individual. The delegates were, however, generally illiterate, having grown to maturity under the traditional manor system with no opportunity to become literate. Over the seven years ending in 1964-5, the delegates ranged around 42 years of age and from no schooling at

all to an average of a few months (in 1958-59). Illiterate delegates took the only course open to them. They began to recruit the services of newly literate schoolboys (termed *leidors*) to accompany them to the fields to serve as timekeepers.

Since the *leidors* kept the records, which no one else could read, including the delegate, they immediately acquired considerable power over both the delegate and the zone residents. For the *leido* necessarily became the final arbiter of disputes over labor tax payment, citing his work records as authority for saying that a person did or did not still owe labor time. Schoolboys thus attained a kind of power in the fledgeling community that would have been impossible for youths of comparable age under the traditional manor system.

It is not unknown, as a matter of fact, for the Vicos *leido* who is also genetically related to a delegate to assume, to an extent embarrassing to other members of the community council, that he may sit in the council's deliberations in the absence of the delegate himself.

One of the more striking new power domains at Vicos involves the first natives to take teaching roles in the formal enlightenment process there.

Despite the small proportion of girls attending school in Vicos, the first local teacher is a teenage girl. A Peace Corps Volunteer who opened a new sectional school in Vicos in 1963 employed a local bilingual, literate helper. Since the Volunteer was female, she chose a female assistant, the best-educated Vicos girl. The latter attended the local primary school for three years on a scholarship provided by a scientist who carried out studies at Vicos in 1960. This young lady is not a native of the zone where the new school operates so that when she began serving as teaching assistant to the Volunteer in charge of the new school, she acceded to a position of authority over school children from families other than her own in a zone other than her own. This was the first time such an event occurred in Vicos.

Already 1964 has witnessed a further extension of this type of teacher-student power domain. The girl just mentioned continued to assist a second Peace Corps Volunteer, but a Vicos boy with a fourth grade education opened another new sectional school in another zone with a Peace Corps Volunteer as his helper.

The establishment of teacher-pupil power domains involving Vicos natives as teachers portends a sweeping change of interpersonal relations within the community as more and more enlightened youths will return from normal school to teach Vicos children. These Vicos "in-

tellectuals" confirm the proposition that the amount of cultural change produced in a cross-cultural situation is proportional to the amount of personal interaction. For the most modernized and most changed persons in Vicos are the youngsters who have spent the most time in the formal educational system.

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