

## Un 'imperial meridian' italiano a Peru, c.1840-1890

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Human mobility was power, Luigi Einaudi insisted in 'Il principe mercante' (1899). Indeed, the maxim that '*trade follows the flag*' was a damaging fallacy, which had led Italians mistakenly to invest in the 'inospitali terre, abitate da barberi poco vestiti ed insensibili ai bisogni della civiltà moderna' of their formal colonies in Africa. Instead, Einaudi argued, the flag followed trade. 'Free' colonies of migrants had created extensive, informal empires where Italians could be 'merchant princes': they could become 'capitani dell'industria', architects, manufacturers, entrepreneurs, explorers and scholars.

My paper considers the pre-history of Einaudi's publication in the light of Italian 'Informal Empire' in Latin America. Focusing especially on Italian colonies in Peru, I argue that even before Italian unification, and long before acquiring a formal Empire, many Italians thought and behaved 'colonially'. In so doing, they followed established routes and networks that were often a legacy of Italy's early-modern maritime Empires, and of the Genoese maritime world in particular. To illustrate this point, I look at two extraordinarily successful Italian emigrants in mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century Lima: the Genoese merchant Giuseppe Canevaro and the Milanese scientist Antonio Raimondi. Both can be considered 'founding fathers' of Republican Peru but both were Italian patriots and maintained links with Italy; Canevaro especially kept a dual Peruvian-Italian identity.

I also look at attempts by the Italian community in Peru to set up a settlement colony in Chanchamayo, in the Andean Amazon, from the 1870s onwards. The Chanchamayo project, like others in the Andes and Amazon, rested on the settler colonial premise that uncultivated land was 'unproductive' and its indigenous inhabitants had no rights of ownership or possession.<sup>1</sup> The land was opened for colonisation because, according to an 1859 government resolution, "sin embargo de su feracidad permanacen improductivos por falta de cultivo necesario."<sup>2</sup> In this way, the colony justified depriving Amazonians of their land. Moreover, this dispossession was endorsed by a scientific-religious discourse produced by none other than Antonio Raimondi. Raimondi, who had invested in a farm in the Chanchamayo colony, considered only Amazonians baptised as Catholics to be civilised. All others were 'infielos', 'savajes', 'dociles', 'feroces', 'trabajadores' or 'antropófagos'; they were considered useful only as river navigators and, even then, were reduced to picturesque accompaniments of the European explorer. The people who lived in the Chanchamayo mountains Raimondi essentialised as 'muy hostiles': 'Estos selvajes, son por su character desconfiados y vengativos, de manera que, si reciben algun mal, no lo olvidan fácilmente; se vuelven implacables enemigos y no pierden ocasion alguna para vengarse.'<sup>3</sup>

By the 1880s, the Peruvian colony was said to be the wealthiest of all the overseas Italian communities in the world, led by an immensely prosperous financial and business elite. There was nowhere else, an Italian diplomat remarked, where an immigrant could 'con maggior sicurezza e in minor tempo' make more money.<sup>4</sup> 'Perché gli italiani devono preferire il Perú?' asked a guide for Italian immigrants: because, it answered, there were no poor Italians there: 'tutti hanno fortuna e la maggior parte sono padroni di proprietà territoriali.'<sup>5</sup>

I maintain that migrant colonialism was by far the most successful form of Italian overseas expansion, but that its significance has been neglected by many historians.<sup>6</sup> I also take issue with the characterisation of migrant colonialism as a phenomenon linked to the 'Great' migrations of the 1890s and early 1900s. Migrant colonialism was not confined to this short period, and it was far from being simply a response to the flop of Italy's African empire. Instead, before the formation of an Italian nation state, and thus before its failure to acquire substantial African colonies, Italians had become the 'merchant princes' and captains of industry in America that Einaudi so applauded. Moreover, they did so not just in Río de la Plata, but throughout South and Central America. As we shall see, in many places they rivalled other Europeans in their successful business ventures and were pioneers in the creation of colonies of settlement.

By focusing on the significant shift that took place in Italian policy towards Africa, we have ignored several important continuities in other places, which offer a very different picture of Italy's role in the world. In these respects, Italians were more pioneers than latecomers. At different times, the Germans and Swiss forsook national empires and protectorates or did quite well without them. They chose instead to follow the money, and to profit from the full range of trading opportunities and cultural interactions offered by the spread of global capitalism. As in Italy, in Spain a popular narrative developed that criticised the British model of colonialism as motivated by greed, rather than by what was seen as a special Spanish drive to share the benefits of European science and religion. And as Einaudi's remarks above suggest, a form of anti-imperialism accompanied this drive for advantage overseas or, more accurately, a political conviction that the promotion of culture, trade and work was superior to, and more efficient than, the violence and exploitation that many considered to be the dominant characteristic of formal Empire.

Hence, the Italian case seems paradigmatic of a different form of colonialization, one that often consciously rejected the formal empires of Great Britain or France as its model, but that we, as historians, still struggle to classify or properly describe.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> L. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism. A theoretical overview* (London, 2010); P. Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the transformation of Anthropology. The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London, 1999); D. Denoon, *Settler Capitalism. The Dynamics of Dependent Development in the Southern Hemisphere* (Oxford, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> 'Colonización de Chanchamayo – Resolución Suprema – 23 de noviembre de 1859,' in C. Larrabue y Correa, *Colección de Leyes, Decretos, Resoluciones i otros Documentos Oficiales referents al Departamento de Loreto* (Lima, 1905-09), p.116.

<sup>3</sup> A. Raimondi, *Apuntes sobre la Provincia Litoral de Loreto* (Lima, 1862), pp.33, 38, 118.

<sup>4</sup> P. Perolari-Malmignati, *Il Peru e i suoi tremendi giorni. 1878-1881, Pagine d'uno spettatore (1882)* (Milan, 1882), pp.205-06.

<sup>5</sup> *Guida ufficiale per industriali ed emigranti italiani nel Peru* (Lima, 1903), p.1.

<sup>6</sup> Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, is a significant exception.

<sup>7</sup> P. Purtschert and H. Fischer-Tiné, *Colonial Switzerland. Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins* (London, 2015); S. Conrad, 'Rethinking German colonialism in a global age,' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41/4 (2013), pp.543-566. On Spain, see C. Schmidt-Nowara, *The conquest of history: Spanish colonialism and national histories in the nineteenth century* (Pittsburgh, 2006); and for a discussion of Japanese 'anti-imperial' imperialism, see L. Young, 'Subaltern imperialists: the new historiography of the Japanese Empire,' *Past and Present* 225 (2014), 273-88.