Imagining Peru and the Motherland from the Barracks
Memory, Text, and Image in the 1942 First Year Level Military Manual

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Abstract • This article examines a school textbook, the Manual de Instrucción Primaria, which the Peruvian military created in the 1930s in order to help to redeem their indigenous recruits from their racialized backgrounds. On the one hand, the textbook echoed Peruvian elites’ anxieties about the suitability of their indigenous contingents to become part of the nation. On the other hand, the textbook recognized that indigenous people also had the capacity to contribute to Peru’s modernization, especially when they supported the fight against illiteracy. What made this textbook different from others? That the publication was centered around recruits’ daily experience in the barracks. Both text and images may have allowed recruits to develop awareness about themselves and the country that they lived in.

Keywords • Andes, memory, military service, motherland, school textbook

The Peruvian Government Palace is an early twentieth century building located in the Main Square in Lima. One of the first rooms in the Palace is the Choquehuanca and Eléspuru Hall, named after the two military men who died defending the Palace during the armed insurrection against President Augusto B. Leguía in 1909. In spite of this historical reference, and although his name and statue are tangible in the Government Palace, Pedro Potenciano Choquehuanca does not belong to the major pantheon of Peruvian military heroes of the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. Peru’s most known heroes are white military men who died fighting against a foreign enemy in the traumatic War of the Pacific, the conflict between Peru, Bolivia, and Chile, which involved the Chilean occupation of Lima between 1881 and 1883. The memory of these heroes is embodied in public monuments, statues, official buildings, and streets, in the names of provinces and towns in Peru, and in national school textbooks. Even though Choquehuanca’s name and his sacrifice are mentioned again and again every time tourists visit the Palace, his memory has been marginalized.
Choquehuanca’s memory is more present in Huancabamba, the rural Andean province in northern Peru where he was born and where he was drafted in 1907. There, a stadium, a social club, and a school carry Choquehuanca’s full name. There are also statues and busts of him in different plazas around the province. References to his memory also circulate in Facebook groups among northern Peruvians, who consider Choquehuanca a figure who embodies the contributions of rural people to the defense of Peru’s democracy.

Contemporary Peruvian military publications do not usually mention Choquehuanca. However, between the 1930s and the 1950s, the Peruvian military felt it necessary to include his image and talk about his sacrifice in the *Manual de Instrucción Primaria*, the school textbook they created to teach indigenous recruits the basics of first year. Choquehuanca’s photo shows the young sergeant wearing his uniform and the emblems of the infantry battalion that he belonged to. This military photo is the only existing image of the soldier before his death. The image survived Choquehuanca’s lifetime and circulated freely in a military school textbook for over twenty years. Now, during the digital era, that same image is being reproduced in social media and internet entries that praise his sacrifice and keep his memory alive on the margins of mainstream discourses about Peruvian heroism. Perhaps we would not know what Choquehuanca looked like if the military had not taken his picture and included it in their textbook.

This article examines the *Manual de Instrucción Primaria*, a school textbook created by the military for the civilian classes taught in the barracks from the 1930s until the 1950s. This artifact embodies the Peruvian military’s modernizing and civilizing project of the early twentieth century. Historian Frederick Nunn says that during that time, the Peruvian military had the conviction that they had a social role to perform, that the army was an agent of modernization, and that it was capable of civilizing Peru. In a comparative study of school textbooks in Mexico, Argentina, and Peru in the twentieth century, Matthias vom Hau writes that during the oligarchic period, which in Peru lasted until 1930, school textbooks advocated the spread of civilization. This was “a category associated with whiteness, economic modernization, and an urban and cosmopolitan European culture, as the main vehicle for overcoming ethno-racial and political divisions.” Since the Peruvian army was professionalized by a French military mission, and since there was continuous cooperation between the Peruvian and the French military until 1940, we can infer that some of the Peruvian army’s ideas about civilization were informed by the French so-called civilizing mission. Historian Alice Conklin says that mastery was at the core of the French civilizing mission—mastery of nature, of the human body, and of social behavior. She states, “To be civilized was to be free from specific forms of tyranny: the tyranny of
the elements over man, of disease over health, of instinct over reason, of ignorance over knowledge, and of despotism over liberty.” In its content and organization, the Manual de Instrucción Primaria aimed for indigenous recruits to: achieve mastery of the human body via a series of formations and military drills; reform their social behavior by abandoning traditional indigenous practices such as chewing coca leaves; and defeat ignorance by learning how to read and write. The military used the manual pages to represent the nation to themselves and to others. It echoed the concerns of the political and military elites about the need to redeem indigenous people from their indigenousness and to transform them into worthy citizens of Peru. The textbook, however, expressed contradictory discourses about indigenous people. It aimed to civilize and tame indigenous recruits (who were seen as inadequate) while simultaneously acknowledging their capacity to become part of the nation.

By examining a textbook that circulated for over twenty years within the barracks and that may have had a profound impact among several cohorts of Peruvian recruits, this article contributes to our understanding of the Peruvian army’s history in the years after its professionalization by a French military mission. Although the manual may have favored the circulation of certain discourses that perpetuated stereotypical ideas of the indigenous soldier, at the same time, it may have empowered indigenous recruits via its rhetoric and, especially, its images. The article examines the text and two images presented in the textbook. It discusses the rhetoric about the motherland and the imagined community within the barracks as well as the role played by officers and soldiers in a military fort. The article is divided into three sections. The first section examines the role of the army and the school as civilizing institutions; the second section addresses the discourses about the nation, the motherland, and routines within the barracks; and the final section analyzes the relationship between literacy, sacrifice, and the image of Pedro Potenciano Choquehuanca.

Two Civilizing Institutions: The Barracks and The School

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Peru was still a mostly rural country with small cities and a high concentration of indigenous communities living in the countryside. A system of exploitation of the indigenous population by landowners of European descent (gamonalismo) was prevalent. For white/mestizo elites, one of Peru’s main challenges was the “Indian problem,” that is to say, the situation of exclusion and disconnection that indigenous people experienced in the countryside. As was the case in other countries going through a process of modernization, the school and the army were the two most important “civilizing” institu-
Imagining Peru and the Motherland from the Barracks

tions. National elites thought that indigenous people could be redeemed and incorporated into the Peruvian nation via the classroom and the barracks.

Historian Cecilia Méndez states that militarism had great impact on daily life and the formation of the nation in the Central Andean countries. The appeal of uniforms, school parades, public monuments, and the cult of national heroes reveal the proximity between the military and civil society in Peru. Méndez highlights the strong relationship that emerged between the army and the peasantry during the nineteenth century. Peasants were the backbone of national armies; they supplied manpower and helped with logistics. The military also needed indigenous women as camp followers, who in the region were called Rabonas, to provide the troops with care, food, and help to set up army camps.

Méndez mentions that, as the army became more professional with the arrival of a French military mission in 1896, the relationship between the army and the peasantry became more hierarchical and vertical. The army depended less and less on the support of rural societies and indigenous people and more on the centralized state. Under the French influence, the Peruvian government created a new military academy, the Escuela Militar de Chorrillos, reformed military law, and established the ideal of universal military service. This process of professionalization separated the army physically and symbolically from civil society. Furthermore, indigenous camp followers who lived within or very close to the barracks were removed from military premises. Scholars state that nineteenth-century travel literature described Rabonas as barbaric and a threat to Peru’s civilizing ideal. At the end of the century, the Rabonas disappeared as historical figures because they represented an image of Peru excluded from a national imaginary that tried to look modern. The removal of the Rabonas from the military would further reinforce a masculine military ethos and a military culture that positioned the army as a foundational institution in Peru.

According to historian Eduardo Toche, in the early twentieth century, the military felt that the army should be a reflection of the nation where all social classes would mingle in one sole idea, the sacrifice for the motherland. Their aspiration was to create an institution that could represent the nation. However, the principle of a modern army was uniformity, and the Peruvian army was challenged by the large racial and ethnic diversity of its rank and file. Although the French had promoted the ideal of universal military service, in the end, it only became compulsory for indigenous people (those who were not integrated into the Peruvian nation).

Toche adds that army officers usually experienced feelings of ambiguity toward their soldiers. On the one hand, they criticized the local white political bosses (gamonales) and rural elites because they represented
an obstacle to the complete integration of indigenous people.\textsuperscript{14} On the other hand, they were concerned about the challenge of working with large numbers of indigenous recruits whose native language was not Spanish or who were illiterate. For that reason, during the two years of military service, the army provided not only military training but also civilian courses taught by lieutenants or captains that covered the basics of first- and second-year education. The experience of leadership that some recruits enjoyed in the barracks, as well as access to literacy, may have contributed to a social awakening among some of the rank and file. Méndez states that in the first two decades of the twentieth century, many veterans of military service (licenciados) became peasant leaders who defended their communities from the abuse of the expanding hacienda system, especially during the second government of President Augusto Leguía (1919–1930).\textsuperscript{15}

The other civilizing institution in twentieth-century Peru was the school. Scholars Gonzalo Portocarrero and Patricia Oliart state that the school spread the message that all Peruvians were equal before the law. To achieve that goal, indigenous people had to embrace change and become “de-indigenized” in the classroom. When they were no longer indigenous, they would be able to get the same rights as any other Peruvian and would become citizens.\textsuperscript{16} In a country affected by the legacies of colonialism and where gamonalismo was widespread, the school had subversive implications because it challenged Peru’s traditional structures of power and race.

The first expansion of public education to the countryside took place during the Civilista rule. The Civilista Party controlled Peruvian politics between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Civilistas thought that indigenous people had to become literate and learn Spanish, geography, and national history in order to be integrated into the Peruvian nation. They promoted the construction of schools in the capitals of the provinces and the creation of teacher colleges to train new cohorts of teachers for rural schools. Between the 1930s and 1940s, the expansion of public education to rural areas faced fierce resistance from the gamonales, who had usually monopolized access to reading, writing, and the basics of Western culture in the countryside.\textsuperscript{17} The gamonales were afraid to lose control over indigenous communities and feared that this approach in education could promote the rise of peasant leaders who would fight for their communities’ rights. Although the gamonales tried to stop the expansion of the rural school system, they could not do the same with the army. They did not have the power to prevent the military from enforcing conscription and teaching basic literacy to recruits. As we see, both civilizing institutions, the army and the rural school, provided indigenous people with access to some education, and especially literacy.
The history of literacy efforts carried out by the Peruvian military still needs to be written. However, we can reconstruct a fragmentary landscape based on the scarce sources available. We know that the army was trying to teach recruits how to read and write since the early 1900s, probably influenced by the French experience in its African colonies. Portocarrero and Oliart mention some school materials that were in circulation around that time. It seems that after the First World War, the Peruvian army took their recruits’ education more seriously and began to develop school materials to cover the basics of first and second year. In the 1930s, the military created the manual under examination in order to teach indigenous recruits the basics of Peru’s history, geography, and civic education, as well as how to read and write. The rationale behind these educational efforts was to civilize indigenous troops, transform them into good soldiers, and make them literate.

Literacy could have a powerful impact on indigenous people. In the 1970s, in one of the rare oral histories of an indigenous peasant recorded in Peru, Gregorio Condori-Mamani remembered his stay in the barracks in the 1930s, the period in which our school textbook began to circulate. Born around 1909 in a small indigenous community in Cusco, southern Peru, Gregorio was drafted around 1931. When the interviewers asked him about his experience in the army, he evoked his daily routines, the constant drills that he found boring, and the mule he had to take care of because he was a machine gunner and a mule driver. He also talked about the different types of abuse that he had to endure within the barracks, especially from sergeants and corporals, who frequently were indigenous like him. Only tangentially did Condori-Mamani mention literacy. He said that there was “an alphabet in the barracks for those who can’t read, the wood-block letters [were] strung up on a wire: a, b, c, d, j, k, p.” He added that “the non-commissioned officers would teach us the alphabet” and when “you finished learning it, they’d put you in first grade. Alphabet practice was always after lunch.” He continued saying that,

they taught me the alphabet there in the army. I was able to sign my name and—a, o, i, p—I could also recognize some letters of the alphabet on paper. But I didn’t have the brains for the alphabet, and I just couldn’t learn it. Soon after leaving the army, I forgot how to read the letters I’d learned or how to spell my name. They say that nowadays [1973], whoever enters the army unable to see, comes out with their eyes open and knowing how to read. And those unable to speak also come out with Spanish flowing off their tongues.¹⁸

Condori-Mamani spent three years in the army, and in this quote, he revealed his initial exposure to the basics of writing and how he could sign his name. He also says that he was able to decode some letters. He remembered the wood-block letters, but he didn’t mention a textbook.
He recognized his struggles as an adult man who was forced to learn the ABCs. He argued that the reason he was not able to get promoted even to corporal was because he didn’t “get anywhere with the alphabet.” Condori-Mamani’s remembrance is powerful because it conveys how not being able to read and write and not speaking Spanish—Peru’s official language—was experienced in the body. He acknowledged the power of literacy as a way to be able to “see” the world. Illiteracy meant having his eyes closed. Being able to speak Spanish was related to eloquence. Furthermore, in the foregoing quote, Condori-Mamani recognized how in the 1970s, the army still was an institution for indigenous people’s integration to Peru.

**Imagining the Nation, Officers, and Soldiers via the Manual**

At the Peruvian military archive, I was able to examine a copy of the manual’s seventh edition, from 1942. The school textbook of 218 pages was first published in 1936 by the Peruvian Ministry of War. The manual included sections on language, history, geography, arithmetic, anatomy, and moral and civic education. It had a combination of text and images (cartoons and photographs). What made the manual special was that while other school textbooks were aimed at children, this was a book for adults who were going to spend at least two years in the army. According to the executive order transcribed on the book’s third page, in 1936 Peruvian President General Oscar R. Benavides authorized the textbook’s new edition as well as the introduction of some changes suggested by the Ministry of War. We do not know the exact nature of those changes because the earlier edition was not available in the archive. However, we know that the previous edition “had been sold out,” and that the textbook had “to be distributed freely among recruits.” The advisory board behind the manual was made up of four teachers trained at the prestigious Lima Teachers College and by two army commissioned officers. We can assume that if several teachers were involved in the creation of this text, the content was aligned with the expectations and standards of other educational textbooks of the time.

The textbook provided a written and visual narrative of recruits’ daily experience in the barracks through various references to daily exercise, drills, weapons training, bodily care, personal hygiene, and care of pack animals. As a primary source and cultural artifact, the *Manual de Instrucción Primaria* reveals several dimensions of the army’s civilizing mission in the first half of the twentieth century. It suggested that Peru’s racial and ethnic diversity had to be overcome, transformed, and redeemed in order to create a more cohesive nation. The textbook echoed the civilizing discourse of the Civilistas, the followers of the Civilista Party, with its
emphasis on language, geography, and the Westernization of indigenous people. The manual underscored the army’s role in Peruvian society and provided a patriotic and militaristic narrative from which soldiers could make sense of Peru. In addition, the manual reinforced hierarchies of power within the military. It naturalized the hegemonic role of white/mestizo elites (embodied in the figure of the commissioned officer) and the subordinate place of indigenous recruits.

We can see the manual as an artifact that allowed the army to spread their ideas about an imagined community. In his seminal work, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that in the nineteenth century, print capitalism (the technological mass production of newspapers and novels and the spread of vernacular print languages) contributed to the emergence of national imagined communities. These artifacts allowed individuals to relate to others and to think of themselves as a group different from other constituencies. Anderson wrote that a nation is “imagined” because most citizens will never meet one another face-to-face, and they still see themselves as being part of a “political community” that is like a family, with similar origins, mutual interests, and “a deep, horizontal comradeship.”23 Anderson’s model of nationalism and imagined communities has been challenged for the early nineteenth century in Latin America. Some scholars question both his chronology and the cause-and-effect narrative that explains the emergence of nationalism in Spanish America.24 They agree that there was an essential link between reading and writing and nationalism but question Anderson’s idea that these practices were relevant before the colonies gained independence in the early nineteenth century. Despite these objections, some elements of Anderson’s theoretical framework remain useful in order to explain the idea of an imagined community in Peru from the military perspective, especially because the manual, an item of print capitalism, circulated within the barracks for over twenty years.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, due to the process of professionalization they went through, army officers were part of Peru’s most important bureaucracy. As they physically moved around Peru’s coast, highlands, and rainforest, they experienced their country’s geography, became aware of their country’s challenges, and came into contact with the diverse contingents that filled up the barracks. They also had to deal with the legacy of their defeat in the War of the Pacific. They wrote about these issues in military journals such as *Revista Militar del Perú*. These writings circulated and were consumed by an officer corps willing to become modern and anxious about the inadequacy of their indigenous troops.

These anxieties also permeated the school textbook under examination. For example, the manual discussed how it was possible to create a nation in Peru out of a very diverse population. It said that in Peru there
were three million indigenous people who were “noble and outstanding in the history of the pre-Columbian civilizations.” Their indigenousness had not allowed them to be completely integrated into the Peruvian nation because they were either illiterate or did not know how to speak Spanish. The text voiced the discourse of the white/mestizo elites that glorified the Inca past and that at the same time expressed disdain for contemporary indigenous communities. According to the text, unity of language was necessary to achieve national unity. In order for all Peruvians to be able to understand each other, indigenous people had to learn Spanish. The barracks would be the space for that endeavor.

The textbook positioned the commanding officer as the main agent of the army’s civilizing mission. He was described as the teacher who would shape the recruit’s mentality, introduce him to Peru’s history, and plant the seeds of military nationalism. In order to help the officer to fulfill his role effectively, the manual gave specific directions about how to teach well. It said that the officer needed to be a good storyteller and use multiple visual sources. The manual even gave details about how to write something on the blackboard measuring the space between lines with a ruler. Lesson 1 was the text’s foundational chapter because it developed the argument that if the officer was the agent of civilization, the recruit was the subject that needed to be acted upon. The chapter defined the soldier as “the citizen who trains in the barracks to defend the motherland.” The recruit had to be “civilized,” and he had to learn that he belonged to the Peruvian nation. This lesson also provided a reflection about the centrality of space as it made comparisons between Peru’s geography and the spatial distribution of a barrack. A department (the highest level administrative subdivision of the country), the text said, was like a barrack inside a military fort.

Toche writes that after the army became professionalized, the first days in the barracks were used for drills with and without weapons. The purpose of these physical tasks was to achieve harmonic coordination within the group. Those first drills helped the recruits to familiarize themselves with military routines and to establish familiarity between them. Establishing familiarity was an important aspect of what the manual sought to accomplish on behalf of the army. According to sociologist Maxime Felder, familiarity is “an ongoing relational and interactional achievement” that combines two ways of knowing: knowing well and knowing superficially. Felder also writes that familiarity is a relationship to the world that develops “over time and through repeated exposure.” In the barracks, recruits were able to recognize others who were doing military service like them and who, like them, were probably illiterate and indigenous.

Familiarity is also a sensory experience, which “is acquired hands on, through routine, while attending to everyday life.” The barracks was
a world of new sensory experiences. Recruits had to orient themselves in the space of the barracks, learn new routines, and, especially, wear new uniforms and clothes. One of the defining moments for indigenous soldiers in the barracks experience was abandoning their traditional or rural clothes, having their hair cut, and starting to wear uniforms that would allow them to be part of a standardized collectivity. Even in a fragmentary way, uniforms provided soldiers with a new identity and allowed them to be part of that larger community that the Peruvian military imagined in a modern country. In the physical space of the barracks, recruits had to see and recognize different types of uniforms and symbols and other elements associated with the military and nationalism. By wearing uniforms, recruits also may have been able to develop social relations with other people like themselves.

In the barracks, recruits also had their pictures taken for their personal files and identification cards. It is possible that the first images ever taken of them would be in the context of those first weeks in the barracks and wearing very short hair. This first photo would have been formative in teaching recruits to see themselves in an image that looked like them and that was different from their commanding officers, who were usually white/mestizo men. Pedro Potenciano Choquehuanca’s only available image comes from the army’s use of the technology of photography.

According to the manual, the barracks was not only the space where soldiers would be familiarized with a new universe of objects and symbols. It was also the place where recruits would be able to make “many memories among the brothers in arms,” where they would learn “useful things,” and where they would share the joys of life with their leaders and comrades. Photographs could be the tangible record of experiences gained in the barracks, including sports and physical activities such as marching, shooting, and driving, activities unique to the military institution.

Toche writes that after the initial stages of drilling in small groups and as the recruits’ discipline improved, the military had to start working in order to “work the recruits’ intelligence.” It was in this context that officers began teaching civilian classes, where they drew on familiar objects in order to promote learning, especially to teach soldiers basic arithmetic and literacy. In the text, we see bullets, berets, rifles, grenades, lanterns, and hand shovels that recruits would use during their daily routine in the barracks. There are also images of tin cups, items associated with the dining hall (because in the professional army the soldiers didn’t need the ceramic or gourd utensils of the Rabonas). All these artifacts would help soldiers learn numbers and mathematic concepts too.

In the barracks, indigenous recruits also learned about the motherland, the Patria. In Lesson 32, a poem described the motherland as the land where Peruvians were born. It said that the Patria is the second
mother and those who do not love her, do not love Peru. They are not good children, they are not good Peruvians, and they cannot be good soldiers. The textbook would reiterate the idea that a good indigenous man was ready to sacrifice himself for the nation. Later in the book, we see an image that represents the Patria (Figure 1). Even though it is only a cartoon figure, it is obvious that this representation of the motherland is of a white woman in a predominantly indigenous country. The Peruvian Patria as a white female was associated with the coastal and urban areas, not with the highlands or with indigenous communities. As I mentioned earlier, indigenous women were important in nineteenth-century armies in Peru because they were in charge of logistics and provided emotional support to the soldier. The presence of indigenous women within or near the barracks was also a deterrent against desertion. As the army physically removed indigenous women from military premises, it reinforced the cult of the motherland as a white woman embodying the Patria. There is no reference to the Rabonas in the school textbook under analysis, or of indigenous women’s major contribution to the Peruvian army.

As represented here, the Patria as a white woman looks strong, powerful, fearless, and larger than all the soldiers behind her, who more than protecting her are following her lead. The Patria is wearing body armor, holding the Peruvian flag in her arms and a saber in her right hand. In the

![Figure 1. The Motherland (Patria), Manual de Instrucción Primaria, 1 (© public domain).](image-url)
background, one can see the cavalry charging. This may be a reference to
the Battles of Ayacucho and Junín, which secured Peru’s independence
from Spain in 1824. In the background, there is a rising sun, which was
a very common way to portray the impact of the civilizing mission. There
are also airplanes, a reference to the military aviation created in 1919. The
word “patria” is written in bold capital letters. The image is an idealiza-
tion of the female figure, one of the few representations of women that
was acceptable within the army at the time.

The manual was fundamentally a reflection of Peruvian officers’ fan-
tasies about how to deal with the otherness of their indigenous recruits.
The text may have said that the Patria was the motherland, but how
would an indigenous soldier be able to relate to this image? What levels
of identification could exist between him and the narrative conveyed
in the cartoon? To a certain extent, the fact that the men surround-
ing the Patria were wearing the same uniforms as real-life soldiers may
have established a level of initial familiarity. They also wore uniforms in
the barracks, they also had to do physical training with their rifles and
bayonets, and they could also probably position their bodies in the same
way as the soldiers in the image. They had to carry backpacks and dig
foxholes in the open fields. But what about the woman? If the written
text in the book said that the motherland was their second mother, how
could indigenous recruits relate this “woman” to their own mothers in
the countryside?

The Power of Literacy and Image

In the barracks, soldiers learned not only to love the motherland and to
defend the nation but also the basics of reading and writing. One of the
most transformative experiences within the space of the barracks for il-
literate soldiers was becoming literate. When indigenous recruits learned
how to read, they were “awakened” to the larger world and they would
be able to be part of the nation. They would be able to read about other
soldiers like them and those who lived in other barracks across Peru.
Those who also belonged to the imagined community.

The military believed that indigenous soldiers could also be active
participants in Peru’s collective fight against illiteracy. The expectation
was that after finishing serving their country, the former recruits or licen-
ciados would go back to their communities and help spread some of the
skills acquired in the barracks. The epigraph at the back of the manual’s
cover said that “the best way to contribute to our country’s greatness is
by fighting against illiteracy.” It also encouraged recruits to “cooperate
with this patriotic labor of improving the morals of our people.” The mili-
tary asked soldiers to “take care of this manual, not to lose or destroy
it” and to “spread its teachings among [their] family and [they] will be able to contribute to the progress of our race and the greatness of the Motherland.”

On a different note, reading would allow recruits to learn about Peru and the army’s institutional past, especially those events that were functional to the institution. In the section “Duties that Patriotism Imposes,” the text highlights two exemplary stories that hint at how recruits should behave in the barracks and that reveal the anxieties of the military elites about indigenous people’s loyalties to the Peruvian state. The first is a reference to a corporal named Juan (without a last name), who is described as good and generous. He studied eagerly, always told the truth, and was able to control his bad temper. He did not drink alcohol, and he hated coca leaves. He also respected his superiors and was respected by his subordinates. Juan also took care of his health, striving to be strong in order to be able to defend the motherland. The other soldier was Matias (also without a last name) who wanted his platoon to be the strongest and bravest in the army so that it could become a model for other platoons. In this narrative, Matias was also a model soldier because he embraced his subordinate position in the army’s hierarchical structure.

Overall, the lesson naturalized class and race hierarchies in Peru. A good indigenous soldier achieved mastery of his body and of social behavior and did not question or challenge authority. The text also expressed the military’s concerns about the potential disloyalty of their indigenous recruits. That lesson said that once, during some uprisings in his province, Matias had intervened in order to restore peace. He had rejected the bad advice coming from rioters and had supported his military leaders with enthusiasm. Soldiers like Matias knew how to fulfill their duties in the service of the motherland because they knew that the “attacks that Peru suffered were attacks on all Peruvians.” Likewise, they knew that “the dangers that threatened the nation were also dangers for all of us. Facing these dangers, rejecting these attacks was a way to save the Patria...those who did not defend the Motherland were cowards and guilty of treason.” The story of Matias went on to inform the reader about his own responsibilities fighting the dangers threatening the Peruvian nation in the early twentieth century.

There is an entry that I found particularly relevant because of its emphasis on literacy and the power of the image next to it. This section, from Chapter 21, talked about a young recruit who had studied his lessons well. When he had learned how to read and write, “the first thing that [he wanted] to do [was] to commemorate [Potenciano Choquehuanca] the brave, loyal guard who was killed protecting the Government Palace” in Lima during the riots of 1909. According to the text, Choquehuanca was a hero because he had died fulfilling his mission defending the nation.
The text was complemented by a profile photo of the young soldier. In a textbook where representations of indigenous people were usually collective, where indigenous recruits were represented as amorphous bodies or just called by their first names, this was one of the few individual images of a real soldier with a full name. When indigenous soldiers read about Pedro Potenciano Choquehuanca, they were learning about the sacrifice of somebody who looked like them, who had been drafted and brought to Lima, and for whom a room in the Government Palace had been named. Choquehuanca was different from other heroes though. He had not died fighting against foreign enemies but against fellow Peruvians, and he was also indigenous.

The grainy photo that portrays Choquehuanca shows a young Peruvian recruit with indigenous features looking at the camera. Choquehuanca looks almost like a child. With his uniform and short hair, the young sergeant who was drafted from an indigenous community in northern Peru looks respectable; he has been tamed, “civilized” in the barracks. In his collar, he wears the number three, an indication that he belonged to the third infantry battalion stationed in Lima. The picture must have been taken for some of the files or identification documents that soldiers needed to have in the army. The uniform and the emblems may have signified something for the soldiers looking at this picture, even before they were able to read.

Roland Barthes writes that every photograph is “a certificate of presence” and that all photographs “tell of death in the future.” Choquehuanca was in front of the camera, alive. By the time his image circulated in the textbook, Choquehuanca had been dead for a couple of decades. There is something upsetting about this picture. Following Barthes, there are two elements in all pictures, the studium and the punctum. The studium is the cultural setting that the picture makes reference to; it is “the classical body of information that allows the viewer to participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions of a photograph.” The studium of this picture is military service at a time when it was compulsory only for indigenous men and when the risk of political instability was expressed in the attempt to overthrow a Peruvian president.

Choquehuanca’s gaze touches me. It arouses my sympathy. Those eyes were alive when he was looking at the camera. His gaze is the punctum. The punctum is the something in an image that captures our attention and that is not necessarily linguistic. It is that something that invokes curiosity or disturbance, brings out something, a blind field. The punctum triggers emotions in the viewer. It affects them. The detail is the punctum. When looking at the image of Potenciano Choquehuanca, I feel uncomfortable about his piercing eyes. I wonder what he was thinking about when the
picture was taken. Was he planning to go back to Huancabamba after the draft? Or did he want to further his career in the army? In the textbook, Choquehuanca’s image illustrated a passage that explained how literacy allowed recruits to learn about the importance of sacrifice within the army. I wonder whether the recruits would have seen this picture in the same way. While the army’s intentions are easy to grasp, we cannot be sure about what this image really may have meant for recruits.

According to Elizabeth Edwards, photos make history in at least three overlapping registers. These include the spatial register of the photographic frame, the temporal context in which the photo was taken and the performative link that emerges from the ways in which the photo is curated, exhibited, and talked about. While Choquehuanca’s photograph was made sometime before his death in 1909, its “performative link” is the context of the 1930s and 1940s, when the textbook was used in the barracks. At that moment, the army was especially concerned about the threatening influence of APRA, a political organization that had been able to radicalize some groups within the Peruvian army. It is in that context that the army tried to portray not only Choquehuanca but also recruits Juan and Matias (from the exemplary stories) as good soldiers and as examples to follow.

A central point in Edward’s work is the idea that photographs are sites in which different historical perspectives and experiences converge. Choquehuanca’s photo from the early twentieth century was resignified in the 1930s in a textbook for mostly illiterate soldiers. We can imagine that some recruits on guard in the Government Palace moving around the Choquehuanca-Eléspuru Hall may have read about his sacrifice in their textbook. In the digital era, that same picture, no longer constrained by the materiality of a physical textbook, is being resignified by a small community of Peruvians who demand larger recognition from the Peruvian state.

Figure 2. Potenciano Choquehuanca, Manual de Instrucción Primaria, 12 (© public domain).
Conclusion

For almost twenty-five years, the Peruvian army continued publishing the manual that first appeared in the early 1930s. If we consider that those doing compulsory military service were mostly indigenous, we can infer that the narratives about Peru, the motherland, daily life in the barracks, and the paternalistic relationship between commissioned officers and recruits may have had an impact on several cohorts of young men going through the barracks. We know that images were important for military elites for bureaucratic purposes. The army needed to take pictures of recruits for their military ID cards and personnel files. We also know that the military needed photographers to take pictures of some of the special moments taking place in the barracks, such as parades, closed formations, bivouacs, or national ceremonies. For the army officers and teachers involved in producing the manual for over two decades, it was important to include pictures of those activities even when the quality of the images was not the best. The images accompanying the text may have allowed recruits to imagine themselves and others—those living in other barracks and in other regions in Peru. The images in the text may also have fired up the recruits’ imagination.

By 1956, the manual had been reissued sixteen times and thousands of recruits had learned the basics about Peru from it. Throughout the 1960s, in the context of the Cold War in Latin America, the Peruvian army, probably inspired by the massive literacy campaign launched in Cuba after the revolution in 1959, also implemented a big literacy campaign in Peru. But the army was no longer using the textbook; it only used alphabet workbooks to teach students how to read and write and no longer taught classes of history, geography, or civic education. The military, however, was still interested in highlighting the army’s modernizing role in Peru.46

In 1965, Actualidad Militar, the official periodical of the Peruvian army, published a series of comic strips that followed the lives of young recruits who had come to Lima to do military service and who would go back to their communities bringing with them the skills of modernity at the end of their service. One of those skills was literacy. More recently, we see the value of literacy and an education associated with the Peruvian army in the narratives about the Peruvian Civil War (1980–2000). In When Rains Became Floods, veteran and scholar Lurgio Gavilán reflects on his experience as a child soldier in the Shining Path guerrilla, and later as a soldier in the Peruvian army. It was his experience in the barracks that allowed Gavilán to learn how to read and write. He became literate thanks to the military. By that time, the army was no longer teaching recruits the alphabet in the barracks but was encouraging them to attend the local rural schools of the locations where they were stationed.
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Notes

1. Pedro Potenciano Choquehuanca was born in Sondorillo, Huancabamba, a small indigenous village in the north of Peru in 1889. He was drafted in 1907 and was sent to Lima to the Third Infantry Battalion. It seems that he performed well in his unit because by the time of the attempted coup d’état against President Augusto B. Leguía, Choquehuanca was stationed as part of the guard at the Government Palace. He was on guard at the left gates when the riots began. He was shot, but before he died, he used his rifle-fixed bayonet against his opponent. In 1926, to commemorate his sacrifice, President Leguía unveiled a bust with his likeness.


10. In her study of Rabonas, Miseres shows how important it was for the professional military to create dining halls so that soldiers no longer depended on a Rabona to have their meals ready. Miseres, “Las Ultimas de la Fila,”192.
11. Ibid., 187.
13. Ibid., 24.
17. The *Indigenista* project, on the other hand, focused on teaching indigenous people how to read and write in their own indigenous language. This project was fashionable between the 1940s and 1950s, a time when there was an expansion of the school system in the Andean countryside.
19. Ibid., 53.
21. Ibid.
22. One of the officers was Lt. Colonel Odría, who would become President of Peru in 1948 via a military coup. During the mid-1950s, General Odría would be responsible for the legislation that would create a new pantheon of heroes for the Peruvian army.
28. Ibid., 3.
31. Ibid., 6.
33. Toche, *Guerra y Democracia*, 82.
37. Coca leaf consumption is an ancestral practice in the central Andean countries. Indigenous people chew it or consume it in tea.
39. It is possible that the Peruvian army decided to circulate these stories about the risks of internal unrest because it had concerns about the power and influence of Peru’s Socialist Party (APRA), which attempted to create a network of antiimperialist, social, and political movements in Latin America. By the 1930s, APRA had tried to infiltrate the army.
42. Ibid., 96.
43. Ibid., 26.
44. Ibid., 57.
46. I have discussed elsewhere how, in 1961, the Peruvian Military Academy implemented a program to train first lieutenants to become literacy instructors. My own father was a young cavalry lieutenant in the 1960s, and he received training as a literacy instructor for his indigenous troops. See also Lourdes Hurtado, “Velasco, National Rhetoric, and Military Culture in Cold War Peru,” in *The Peculiar Revolution: Rethinking the Peruvian Experiment Under Military Rule*, ed. Paulo Drinot and Carlos Aguirre (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 171–190.