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Lang Submission Reflective Essay

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### Reflection on my Research Project

The inception of my research project came from the unexpected discovery of hundreds of v-shaped animal traps in the Andean altiplano via satellite imagery. Originally thought to have been ancient structures, excavations and radiocarbon dating show that the traps are only about 300 years old. Due to my interest in the colonial era in the Americas, I wanted to determine if these structures were a part of Indigenious Andean practices, if they were introduced by Spanish colonists, or if they were the product of both. Personally, I view my research project as broken down into three phases: the initial process of information gathering, the writing based upon the information found, and the gathering of additional supplemental material to revise and refine my work. By reviewing colonial, archaeological, ethnographic, and academic sources I hoped to shed light on unanswered questions regarding the historic use and management of resources in the Andean highlands.

In the first phase of research I went through and found as many sources as possible that mentioned *chaccus*, the name most closely associated with the traps. The term *chaccu* was difficult to find considering there are a multitude of spelling of the Quechua word. By using library and google databases I figured out the majority of information on *chaccus* is based around colonial records, academically reviewed literature and contemporary ethnographies of the hunting method. Vicuña are the most likely animal that would have been hunted using the *chaccu* method considering the traps are found at the same elevations vicuña occupy. Today,

these small camelids are protected, and their wool is a highly valued luxury item only attainable through live shearing methods. The vicuña suffered a major population collapse in the centuries following colonization, and I present the most likely hypothesis for this decline as the result of overexploitation. To give background context to the vicuña, I researched vicuña ecology and the prehistoric relationships between Andean peoples and camelids. Then, I further investigated the relationship between the vicuña and humans during the Inkan empire, the colonial, post-colonial, and contemporary eras.

After I started the writing stage of my project I began to notice gaps in information I compiled thus far, the main one being the lack of direct quotes from colonial accounts on *chaccus* and vicuña, and I decided to further add to my initial research. In order to find accounts from colonial-era chroniclers I used the eHRAF database through library access which turned out to be the most beneficial in finding quotations to support the academic research I had already compiled.

Additionally, during this third phase I better scrutinized the sources I was using, and further looked into the sources being used by the researchers I had cited. One of the sources I was more skeptical of using was a book produced by the Loro Piana fashion company. Even though the ethnography they produced was not usable in terms of citable academic sources, it did offer some insight to the current uses for modern *chaccus* as well as the modern vicuña wool market which I was able to include in the contemporary section of my paper. I also scrutinized several academic sources that encompassed the topics of colonial Spanish trade and textiles, but ultimately did not have any mention of vicuña or vicuña wool which was an important and major resource during and after colonization.

The biggest challenge, and still unanswered question, while conducting my research was the utter lack of any information or evidence of vicuña wool being transported to Europe and being made into luxury products prior to contemporary times. A major goal when this project began was to figure out what the animal traps were supplying, and while I do know there was a major vicuña wool market, there is minimal documentation of the kinds of things vicuña wool was used for or made into. I attempted to locate shipping reports and little known colonial sources mentioned and cited in the academic sources I used, but ultimately found that a majority of these documents are not accessible online. I speculate within my paper that perhaps the information simply has been lost to time, or that limited knowledge during the colonial era might have led people to mistake vicuña wool for other materials.

My finalized research paper utilizes the information I compiled to present a working model of the colonial and postcolonial vicuña wool economy. In this model I suggest the archaeological animal traps were likely associated with Indigenous hunting practices and were further developed by the Spanish in the colonial era to hunt mass numbers of vicuña. However, more archaeological work needs to be done to confirm the date range of the animal traps, and further investigation needs to be conducted to determine if there are any surviving vicuña wool products that will provide more insight to the finer details of the vicuña wool items being made and the methods used to make them. My intention is that this research and model is only a first step in better understanding the lasting impacts that Spanish colonization had on both the vicuña and on traditional Andean practices.