This paper examines the forced resettlement of indigenous peoples in late 16th century colonial Peru. Through my research I discuss the political and religious influence of vernacular church architecture in creating subordinated spaces in Carrizales, a small reducción located in the Zaña Valley of the North Coast region.

Reducción, or the reformation of Andean society into grid towns, impacted the lives of indigenous peoples throughout Latin America. Using religion as a tool of persuasion, colonial authority was able to control indigenous culture and educate Peruvian peoples through the teachings of the Catholic Church. This attempt to shape indigenous life in a Christian, or “civilized” way is made explicit through the architecture of the church.

The primary concern of the Spanish colonial authority was to recreate the absent body of the Christian Church in the New World. Valarie Fraser writes, “The creation of large religious complexes, including a huge church…represents the importance and power of architecture to impress a public and, in the case of the Indians, to over-awe and impose on them” (1991:116). According to Fraser, the church was not only a symbol, but also a constant reminder of a governing institution.

My research focuses on the church’s establishment and its symbolic significance as a physical manifestation of the “body of Christ” within this community. Through a detailed examination of my archaeological methodology, I analyze how the church determined how its inhabitants lived.

In this paper I address the following questions: How did this particular church enforce colonial authority and assist in the catechization of the indigenous people? Was it tailored in a particular way, and what was its materiality? Was it built by indigenous peoples, and if so, how would this enforce the erection of Christianity from the ground up? Lastly, I observe how landscape, and the structures within it can be used as tools of cultural domination.