Elite Convergence in the Colonial Andes: 1550-1780

In the immediate aftermath of the Spanish conquest, the Spanish state was heavily reliant on native collaborators in order to extract tribute from its vast new territories. Formed out of the pre-conquest nobility and bureaucracy of the Inca Empire and its conquered territories, these new *caciques* served as intermediaries between the Spanish invaders and the indigenous Andean labor force. During the early colonial period, native *caciques* and Spanish merchants, *encomenderos*, *corregidores,* and *hacenados* could be clearly demarcated as distinct groups. However, by the 18th century, the boundary between the two classes was no longer so clear, as the breakdown of the extractive tributary system had resulted in the commercialization of the elite classes. By the end of the colonial period, *caciques* in the Andean region had been subsumed wholly into a broader colonial bourgeoisie.

We focus on the beginning and the end of the colonial period, as a full breakdown of the evolution of the position of Andean native elites in relation to Spanish colonial elites over the entire colonial period is not possible. Brooke Larso taxonomizes the colonial Andean era into three parts: the encomienda years from 1550-1570, the Toledan century from 1570-1670, and era of "decentralized bureaucratic rule and declining overseas commerce" in the century following.[1] Our analysis focuses primarily on two periods: the early years of colonial rule, terminating in the formation of the Toledan system, and the mid-late 18th century, by which time the Toledan system had been largely supplanted, resulting in a process of elite convergence.

The extractive nature of the early colonial system is clear. In *Letter to a King*, a 1400-page tirade by an ex-Incan noble detailing the malaises of the early colonial system, Don Felipe

[1] Larson, *Caciques,* 204

de Ayala writes that "the so-called *corregidores* or royal administrators can usually count upon making 30,000 pesos in cash out of their term of office, and also upon retiring with an estate worth more than 50,000 pesos… The Indian chiefs do not protest because they are accomplices in many of the malpractices… The chiefs sometimes prefer to keep quiet because they are afraid or have no intention of losing their position in the community."[2] This work is dated to the year 1613, and as such falls solidly within the Toledan century. Here, "chiefs" most likely refers to provincial caciques, distinct from those caciques descended from Inca nobles, which he describes as "open-hearted, king, modest, and clever,"[3] owing to their high-class origins. Importantly for our discussion on caciques, it does not depict them as particularly wealthy or of high status. While the author clearly has a low opinion of these chiefs, emphasizing their venality, he depicts them mostly as servile, petty yes-men lording their power over their fellow Indians. *Caciques* clearly existed apart from the broader colonial elite – deriving their personal wealth from the surplus they were able to appropriate from their communities.

However, even in this early period, we can see the seeds of commerce which had been planted in native society. Early *caciques* may not have derived the bulk of their wealth from investment in merchant capital in the same way that later caciques did, but a money economy was certainly beginning to form. [4] Kellog and Restall translate the wills of caciques three who died in the late 16th. One of these lists outstanding debts, implying involvement in the money economy. However, there is not necessarily a direct correlation with material wealth. Within the wills studied, the most extravagantly wealthy, don Melchior, contains no such mentions of debts or credits.[5] In fact, it may have been the poorest who were forced into market relations the

[2] De Ayala, 129
[3] De Ayala, 172
[4] Larson, *Caciques,* 206
[5] Kellogg and Restall, 236-237

earliest. Required tributes in kind often demanded that caciques supply goods which their subjects were not able to produce themselves, because of the complicated ecology of the Andes, forcing villages into barter or exchange. Gradually, demands for tribute in pesos spread, compelling that villages sell their products on the market, but these demands were relatively limited still in the 1550s and 1560s.[6]

The reclaiming of power from the encomenderos by the central state resulted in the formation of the Toledan system. Viceroy de Toledo, governing the viceroyalty of Peru for approximately a decade from 1569 to 1580, enacted a series of reforms which majorly strengthened and streamlined the Peruvian colonial machinery. Of particular note was the *mita* system of corvee labor, an Incan system which Toledo drastically expanded in order to raise a labor force for the Andean silver mines.[7] This system would prove rapidly to not be up to the task of procuring labor in the amounts demanded, in part because of the falling native population, but also because of evasion efforts by Andean peasants.[8] Many of these villagers moved to Spanish *haciendas* or became free laborers at Potosi.[9] However, throughout the colonial period, the large majority of natives continued to live in independent communities, and not as urban laborers or *hacienda* farmers. Larson highlights the production of *forasteros* in large numbers – native village-dwellers who originated from other communities – as one of the major effects of the *mita*.[10] This was of course, highly problematic for the proper extraction of tribute. As she writes, "How could the Toledan policy of segregation, taxation and forced labor recruitment of the peasantry function if almost half of all adult Indian males in southern and

[6] Larson, *Caciques,* 205-206
[7] Lane, 67
[8] Lane, 72
[9] Larson, *Caciques* 199
[10] Larson, 200

central Upper Peru were separated from their ayllus and reduced to tenants or vagabonds, freed from the burden of tribute?"[11] Thus, as soon as the Toledan system was codified, it began to disintegrate.

By the time of the Bourbon Reforms some two centuries later, the nature of the colonial system was quite different. Cacical functions in the Southern Andes increasingly fell into the hands of interinos or intrusos appointed by corregidores. Even hereditary caciques had lost prestige among their constituents because many of them were by then mestizos, tightly connected socially and economically to Hispanic groups, and monopolized the best communal land.[12]

Fundamentally, collapse of the Toledan system represented a reorientation of the colonial elite from an extractive elite to a commercial one. While in the early colonial period, the power of the cacique largely centered on the extraction of labor and tribute, by the late colonial period they served as commercial intermediaries between their subjects and the larger colonial economy.[13] To understand the changed nature of the cacique class, we turn to the large colonial hierarchy in which it was situated. In Larson's analysis, the total capture of the colonial state machinery for private financial gains had been solidified by the 1750s. She suggests that the reforms of the era represented an effort by the Spanish crown to "reassert its control over the Andean peasantry that was subordinated more than ever to the economic interests of the provincial colonial elite."[14]

[11] Larson, 215
[12] Serulnikov, 2013
[13] Lockhart and Schwartz, 332
[14] Larson, *Caciques,* 220

The commercialization of cacical office was a combination of pressures from above and below – both meddling by *corregidores* and independent initiative by wealth natives played large roles. In order to raise revenues, both for their own enrichment and as tribute to the crown, *corregidores*, "could relay on [wealthy] caciques to personally underwrite tribute deficits incurred by their comunidades."[15] In return caciques were permitted to personally appropriate the resources of their communities: land and labor. This process intensified in the 18th century, with trial records of the 1750's demonstrating that "Indians often referred to the office of cacicazgo as property - which in a sense was purchased in installments from the corregidor and Royal Treasury."[16] Again, it is important to underscore that the personal enrichment of caciques was by no means a novel phenomenon. However, through this process, caciques began to replace the political power of their station with personal economic power, in their capacities as landlords, merchants, or manufacturers.

This meddling by corregidores was in large part due to the *repartimiento de mercancias* system. The *repartimiento* has often been characterized as forced sale of goods to the native peasantry. However, it has been reappraised by many historians as a "putting-out" system of credit for commodity production. Merchants would supply credit in the form of "cash, unfinished products, and such capital goods as plows and mules in exchange for the right to buy the finished products."[17] This sort of putting-out system also reflects a capital-labor and core-periphery dynamic which has been described in more depth as applied to the 19th and 20th centuries. *Repartimiento* would turn out to be astonishingly profitable – in 1754, the total volume of exchange was nearly four times the amount of tribute collected.[18] Lockhart and Schwarz note

[15] Larson, *Caciques*, 220
[16] Larson, *Caciques,* 221
[17] Guardino and Walker, 16
[18] Larson, *Caciques,* 216

that by the late colonial period the "most characteristic activity" of the Corregidor in the late colonial period was the sale of "mules, oxen, textiles, tools, and other things."[19] While this list includes some finished goods, notably textiles, which are of particular world-historical importance as a manufactured good, it also includes many factors of production – beasts of burden and tools. As such, it seems reasonable to conclude that peasants purchased, or were compelled to purchase from their caciques some mixture of capital goods, manufactured goods, agricultural commodities, and monetary credit.

Regardless of the exact nature of the *repartimiento*, it is clear that it was a system mediated peasant's participation in the market economy on unfavorable terms which benefitted powerful corregidores and caciques. The crown was incentivized to tolerate the commercialization of corregidores, as it depended on revenues from the sale of the office in 5-year terms, as well as taxes on the repartimiento. And in practice, the crown was content to take a hands-off approach. In the absence of imperial political directive or control, merchant capital became increasingly wedded to political power.[20]

Guardino and Walker describe two strata of elites in late Spanish America. The first was the extravagantly wealthy and powerful "colonial ruling class" which invested heavily in commercial operations and haciendas. These elites built "vertically integrated commercial empires," which were dependent on their use of state power to "manipulate markets in land, labor, and capital." The other strata are described as a bourgeoisie in formation, consisting of "provincial merchants, hacienda administrators, parish priests, muleteers, provincial landowners, and, in some cases, small mineowners and *kurakas*." These groups are distinguished from the

[19] Lockhart and Schwarz, 332
[20] Larson, *Cochabamba*, 119-120

ruling class by their relative lack of economic and political power. They justify this distinction on the division within the elite that formed during the Tupac Amaru rebellion, which they describe as a frustrated bourgeois revolution.[21]

While Guardino and Walker include *kurakas* amongst their elements of the bourgeoisie in formation, we have to assume that their analysis of the colonial ruling class as a class which "depended on its relationship with the representatives of the Spanish state to dominate the Peruvian and Mexican economies" logically extends to include loyalist caciques which put down the rebellion of Tupac Amaru. But further study of the Tupac Amaru rebellion reveals further questions which problematize this distinction between loyalist and insurgent caciques. While the rebellion became significantly radicalized over its course, this was in large part due to the political demands of the peasantry. The demands of Tupac Amaru were not extremely out of the ordinary for the sphere of political discourse, and the Inca elite in particular had been relatively successful in negotiating a strong position within the colonial order. For instance, the demand to replace the Corregidor with a native official had in fact been proposed by the nobility of Cusco just two years before the rebellion.[22]

Note additionally that the leadership of the Great Rebellion, excluding his extended family, came largely from the rural elite of Tinta and southern Quispanchis, made up of "a mix of old Inca and Aymara lineages and rural Spaniards, and the muleteer profession."[23] By and large, the Great Rebellion failed to garner much support amongst caciques. Those caciques which did rebel however, had particular characteristics of note. Tinta was extremely sparsely settled by Spaniards and even Incas, with their elites being largely descended from Aymara lineages. In

[21] Guardino and Walker, 18-22
[22] Garrett, 600
[23] Garett, 611

1689, over 98% of the population was native.[24] Tinta was additionally burdened heavily by the Potosi mita, as they were particularly distant from the mines and were subject to heavier transit costs. In comparison to the great power and wealth that the caciques of Cusco or Lake Titicaca held, there were not entrenched dynastic in Tinta, which was relatively poor.

On the other hand, the aristocrats of Cusco enjoyed a level of status and power unmatched by natives anywhere else within Spanish America. They were connected economically, politically, and maritally to the creole elite of the Andes. Indeed, the native aristocracy, beginning in the 18th century, was allowed access to "universities, military posts, and above all, the Church."[25] While caciques from other regions were recognized for their wealth and power, they were not seen as true aristocrats in the same way that the Inca elites were.[26] This distinction was important in the way that caciques viewed the rebellion. As Garrett phrases it, the Cuzco aristocrats saw Tupac Amaru II as an "arrogant mestizo cacique from a small puna pueblo whose pretension threatened their own understandings of colonial Inca authority."[27] Somewhere in between the heights of Inca aristocrats and the humble Tinta caciques were the caciques of Lake Titicaca, which was dominated politically and economically by cacique dynasties.[28] While these caciques were not as closely tied to the creole elites, when push came to shove they chose to defend the crown – even as their own subjects rose up against them.[29]

The fault line within the cacique class, then, seems to be much more ill-defined. Can we really place the caciques of Titicaca, who were not really connected to the creole elites in the

[24] Garett, 585
[25] Garett, 598
[26] Serulnikov, 40
[27] Garrett, 611
[28] Garrett, 586-587
[29] Garrett, 597

same way as the Cusco elites were, as part of the ruling class? Certainly, they were economically powerful, but it is hard to say that they exerted significant political influence outside of their territories. Furthermore, the division between bourgeoisie-in-formation and ruling class seems to be far more tenuous than Guardino and Walker admit, especially when probed along the lines of the position of caciques. We reject this taxonomy and instead reinterpret this conflict as a conflict between different segments of the bourgeoisie. Instead, the Tupac Amaru rebellion reveals to us that divisions between caciques were simply an instance of the division between different segments of the Andean bourgeoisie. We note as an aside that such a distinction between a comprador bourgeoisie, a national bourgeoisie, and the petite bourgeoisie is common. While we can certainly point to factors such as the differential degree of integration with Spanish elites, the divide between Quechua and Aymara speaking groups, it seems that wealth was one of the major dividing lines. Wealthy and powerful caciques sharing near-peer status with creoles in many cases fell into the camp of the royalists. More provincial, poor caciques saw themselves as closer to peers with the muleteers which rose in large numbers alongside Tupac Amaru: who himself was a muleteer.[30] The division, then is not a qualitative one, but a simple matter of degree. This allows us to conclude, very simply, that by the late colonial period*, caciques* did not exist as a distinct class with particular interests, instead sharing the interests of the strata of the bourgeoisie that they fell into.

As the colonial period progressed, development of the Andean market economy and the inability of the colonial state to extract sufficient revenues via traditional means resulted in the commercialization of posts within the colonial bureaucracy. Both pressures from above to extract more revenues and individual initiative from below resulted in the progressive marriage of

[30] Garett, 588

financial power and political power. As a cacique, ability to pay tribute and maintain one's position as a cacique became contingent on access to not just a native community from which surplus could be extracted, but access to capital and commercial networks. Culturally and ethnically, integration with the Spanish elite proceeded at different paces. But while there were still individual caciques, with differing levels of cultural and ethnic integration with Spanish elites, the economic integration was more or less total. By the time of the Great Rebellion, the class lines that emerged were predominantly between different strata of the bourgeoisie, and between the peasantry and the bourgeoisie. Caciques were not identifiable as a distinct social group.

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