Indians and Mestizos in the "Lettered City"

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A subtle current of resistance to the effects of Spanish colonialism in the lives of Indian elites and their mestizo kin developed in the areas hardest hit by the impact of both the Toledan and the Bourbon reforms in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, respectively. The social movement thus generated articulated a social and intellectual leadership through Andeans’ writing, petitioning in the royal courts, and traveling across the Atlantic to negotiate their agenda with the kingdom’s top authorities and further the enforcement of justice. They struggled for repositioning as ethnic elites in a colonial society whose rulers implemented policies that undermined Indian authority and downgraded mestizos, intensified racial discrimination, and altered the fabric of Andean societies in different but drastic ways; eventually, the most dramatic result was widespread rebellion. Andean intellectuals contributed extensively to the writing of colonial critiques and advocated for imperial reform and social change. Thus, their changing political and religious cultures emerged almost naturally as the salient themes of this history.

As opposed to their earlier counterparts, Andean scholars from the mid-1600s through the late 1700s expanded their scholarly work to take in a wider
field of political and collective endeavors for social change that included the community of *kurakas*, their mestizo relatives, and eventually creole supporters. With the support of members of the lower church and other non-Indian sympathizers, some of the manuscripts were authored collectively; the writers delivered the manuscripts across the Atlantic and directly addressed the king and royal authorities with their discourses of social justice and imperial reform. Their travels and writings helped prompt the production of a body of royal laws that, although barely enforced, still gave Andean leaders a rhetorical tool to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the justice system and thereby the dubious effects of the hegemonic attempts by the Habsburg and early Bourbon authorities to include Andean elites in the process of governance and leadership through laws and noble privileges. These writers and rebels expressed their concern about ethnic autonomy, advocating for Andean elites’ reconstitution from various regions of the Viceroyalty of Peru as a singular constituency (the “Indian nation”) while textually seeking to liberate themselves from the predefined colonial stereotypes of Indians as minors, neophytes, and dependents on state and ecclesiastical tutelage.

These Andean elites constructed a discourse of justice based on a critique of the colonial institutions that loomed large in Andeans’ lives, such as the *mita* system, *obrajes*, the colonial judicial system of *corregidores* and *audiencia* judges, and the church. A strong indictment against abuses of Indians and the corruption and incompetence of officials and priests, as well as ethnic discrimination within social institutions, characterized Andean narratives of justice while the writers solidified their critiques with their own philosophical and theological interpretations of European notions of natural right, common good, divine justice, and tyranny. They used these frameworks to demand justice and empower their claims for full participation in the church, *cacicazgos*, schools, and knightly orders and showed concern about the preservation of their political autonomy.

In writing and delivering their proposals for social change, Andean intellectuals joined the efforts of informal networks of *kurakas*, sympathetic clerics, and mestizo sympathizers who—perhaps inadvertently—were beginning to create a public space for the expression of Andean views and imaginaries. The demands and cosmopolitanism of these networks reveal that elite Indian and mestizo leaders were evolving into subjects who struggled for incipient forms of enfranchisement, particularly during the mid- and late eighteenth century. Within these networks, participants appeared to reclaim freedom of movement across the Atlantic to actualize their condition as free subjects. Such freedom would also enable them to own property and participate in market transactions with no obstacles, as well as to reclaim management of their own communal assets and funds. As de-colonizing agents, Andeans demanded secular education, civil service, and equal access to social institutions of power with keen awareness of their ethnic autonomy.
Conclusion

The networks that supported these progressive efforts operated through trans-Atlantic and provincial travel, legal representation, protest writing, and negotiations of proposals for social change. Ultimately, the convergence point of these networks, the seat of the Audiencia of Lima and the Audiencia of Charcas, reflected the structure of the colonial justice system and the regional scope of the social unrest caused by the wholesale reforms that consolidated and restructured the colonial system. Occasionally, members of these networks also supported, directly and indirectly, more radical struggles—including the frustrated rebellions in Lima in 1666 and 1750, the Oruro rebellion in 1739, and the Huarochirí rebellion in 1750. The hypothesis regarding the trans-Atlantic networks needs more testing. The full range of roles of this interconnected activism, as well as the history of the formation, change, and continuity of the networks in these and other regions of the Viceroyalty of Peru, deserve further research.

The writings of mid- and late-colonial Indian elites and mestizos were important sites of identity formation, a highly political endeavor in their contemporary lettered culture. Educated Andeans presented themselves as unquestionably loyal subjects of the king while actually subverting the colonial hierarchical order by seeking equality with the Spanish nobility. They were concerned with asserting their “rational” and “civilized” condition as good old Christians while strategically veiling undertones of Andean identity politics. Their constructions of identity also illustrate the extent to which Spanish social and gender norms shaped these scholars’ mental world. While they wrote in part to contest colonial exclusionary practices, their writings also reflected their own internalization of racial biases against blacks and other castas in Peru, as well as their shared views of women as pure, naive, and docile. Similarly, they perceived Indian commoners as helpless (miserables), passive creatures and assumed that, along with women, Indians needed guidance.

Even though most of the Andean texts studied in this book coexisted with the cultural and political expressions of the “Andean Utopia,” starting in the seventeenth century, or with the Inca “revivalism” or “Inca nationalist movement” in the eighteenth century, they offer little association with such trends beyond the self-fashioning heirs of Inca rulers. In the minds of the scholarly Andeans examined in this book, there seemed to be no contradiction among their genealogy as Inca descendants, membership in a homogeneous “Indian nation,” and the overt ruptures with their Inca past that were sometimes needed to reassert their present identities as Christians. Beyond the occasional use of Inca names and symbols and the self-representation as an “Indian nation” lies a consistent agenda for Andean ethnic autonomy under Spanish rule, legitimized with a variety of symbols. This agenda would have empowered elite Indians and mestizos as a group culturally and historically distinct from Spaniards and other castas and, most important, one entitled to justice and to political and social self-determination.
In the case of Túpac Amaru II, for example, by crowning himself the “Inca king” and writing edicts and reales cédulas, he was enacting Andean power by using colonial symbols. Although he protested the burden of tribute, he did not advocate its abolition; further, he did not question Christianity. Perhaps these colonial institutions were accepted as the Andean “contribution” to the colonial pact of reciprocity. The rebel leader’s agenda of Inca rule follows almost naturally the historical tradition of earlier Indian elites who sought noble privileges to defend their positions as caciques or to gain mercedes, which in the Inca past had functioned as customary forms of reciprocity between new rulers and conquered peoples. Túpac Amaru wanted to create an autonomous “republic” of Indians, along with creoles and blacks, rather than an anachronistic return to the Inca society of the past. Andean scholars’ long legal and textual battles and their journeys to Spain to demonstrate direct descent from the Inca and negotiate social privileges seem to have less to do with Inca or, more generally, Andean pre-Hispanic customs than with following Spanish law. Theirs was a struggle for ethnic autonomy within the colonial world, aided by the legal weapons the colonial system made available. When those weapons did not work, as usually happened, Andeans used the weapon of rebellion, but in both scenarios what was at stake was autonomy rather than the revival of the Inca past.

For some Andean writers in the mid-1700s—although none from Cusco Province—the Inca past was long gone, but its symbols were still productive. They had the potential to create a sense of collective identity, a memory Inca and non-Inca Andeans from different regions used in the colonial present to empower and distinguish themselves from Spaniards but equally entitled to social and cultural autonomy within a hierarchical and racialized society. In fact, since the late 1500s, most claimants of Inca descent who sought social or political recognition had been redefining their ethnic identity. Resorting to Inca symbols, they applied for mercedes, aware that the crown recognized the Inca as purebloods and the “natural” lords of the land. Proving Inca descent, then, was the gate to attain noble privileges and, in many cases, to retain or even access for the first time political rights to a cacicazgo. Thus, the notion of an “Indian nation” in the late stages of Spanish rule goes beyond a revivalist claim to carve a wider social and political space within the colonial society in which Indians, mestizos, and creoles—as proposed by Vélez de Córdoba in 1739 and Túpac Amaru II in 1780–1781—were able to live in harmony and obtain justice, away from the interference and “bad example” of Spaniards. The political imaginaries of Andeans since the times of the cédula de honores in 1697 and later, in 1749—with the claims of Fray Calixto for wider participation in the administration of justice, the spiritual realm, education, and the market economy—indicate a new Andean consciousness directed toward the de-colonization of their lives and societies and their cultural and political reaffirmation.
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Túpac Amaru’s vision of a multi-ethnic nation free from Spanish control had antecedents. Even as some claimed Inca descent, the intellectuals from the Andes studied in this work were pushing earlier for the opening up of the political system to redefine Andeans as autonomous political agents rather than Indians. After all, the use of Inca symbols in late-colonial Andean political culture did not preclude other, more progressive political projects. This book not only de-centers and questions the “modern” subject in the Andes by stressing the ways Andean scholars went about de-colonizing through ethnic autonomy but also reassesses its own chronology.

The inextricable relationship between colonial Andean scholarship and religion reveals Andeans’ contribution to unique developments of Christian discourse and theology in Spanish America. They used Christian ethics as the yardstick to criticize the church—which led them to reformulate notions of “sin,” “neophytism,” “idolatry,” and “divine will”—along with raising their voices against the prevalence of old dictates from the late 1500s’ Lima church councils in the management of the priesthood by Peruvian religious orders through the late colonial period. The politicized Christian identity and notions of justice in the scholarship of low-ranking religious men, such as Fray Calixto, Juan de Cuevas Herrera, and Juan Núñez Vela de Rivera, demonstrate that the colonial church was far from homogeneous and that Andean colonial religion cannot be understood without acknowledging the use of Christian discourse to buttress social and political struggles, which unveils Andeans’ wider understanding of spirituality.

Although they professed a Christian religious identity in their writings, their renditions usually diverted from the Spanish church’s ideal of Christianity and seemed to emphasize Andeans’ spiritual and moral superiority vis-à-vis the colonizers and their dubious Christian practices. Becoming a kuraka or a cacique, a priest, a missionary, or an Indian judge or being appointed to a secular position within the local government was not only a means to attain social prestige in colonial Peru but was also a crucial platform for Andeans to participate in the redistribution of justice they felt was necessary to confront colonial racism. Participation in the spiritual realm of colonial society seemed crucial to counteract the general disenfranchisement of Indian and mestizo subordinates connatural to Spanish colonialism. In the end, native resistance to colonialism was exacerbated by the colonial church’s systematic opposition to the legitimate aspirations of longtime converts to partake in the power realm of the sacred, which even royal laws and the disposition of higher political and religious authorities outside Peru seemed to support, at least in their legal discourse.

Wrapped in Catholic devotional phraseology, the recurrence of statements about Indians’ and mestizos’ just right to join the priesthood unveils a political agenda of native power. They not only understood the symbolic power of religious
spaces, positions, and rituals but were also well aware of the actual political power held by priests and church officials in Spanish America. In battling their way into the convent, Andeans learned, among other things, that the realm of spiritual power in a colonial domain was highly contentious—as mediation between humans and God was restricted to a select minority of Spaniards and creoles—and that the colonial church in Peru left only a narrow place, if any, for native Andeans, even as they strove to present themselves as utterly devoted and mature Christians. This recurrence, and the anxiety over access to religious spaces, made evident the colonial church’s failure to include Andeans as Christian equals and made Andeans’ claims to full membership in the Catholic Church a spiritual impossibility as well as a persistent political goal.

The Andean writers encountered in this book pushed the limits of the Habsburgs’ state-crafted segregationist policies to realize a colonial impossibility: Andeans’ almost complete autonomy within the “republic of Indians,” in a realm with no colonial intermediaries between them and the king and no Spanish or non-Andean ecclesiastic emissaries to mediate their connection with God. In addition, Spanish judges, corregidores, protectores de indios, priests, bishops, and doctrineros would not be needed. This political/religious imaginary found initial support in the Habsburg principle of equal entitlement to nobility for the elite Indians and Spaniards of the realm, which expressed itself in a long history of unenforced royal laws and a de facto denial of Indian nobles’ access to key spheres of spiritual and social power. Thus, Indians painfully realized that beyond the legal discourse of the “two republics,” justice in the kingdom was ultimately a means to enforce racial and ethnic inequality.

Andean legal activism sought to secure both the enforcement of previous ineffective laws and the issuing of new cédulas to address the social crisis that had driven Indians into social decline. While the recourse to direct justice from the king in an effort to secure the enforcement and production of laws implied recognition of his ultimate authority, Andean intellectuals and activists also found other ways to influence royal policies, and they indirectly produced a record of colonial laws for their advancement under colonial rule. Thus, they and activists from the Indian networks became visible political agents in colonial judicial life. The turn to legal discourse empowered their petitions and at the same time moved the petitioners to explain the history of judicial negligence through their own accounts, as well as their reflections on the behavior of colonial officials. Thus, the non-enforcement of royal laws represented an avenue to question colonial justice while providing an entry point for the production of critical texts that sought the creation of new laws to correct injustices. Most important, Andean scholarship and political action contributed to legal reformulations of the status of Indian and mestizo elites as subordinate groups in Spanish American societies.
The participation of Andean scholars in the realm of the written word in Peru and Spain—with their ideas, styles of argumentation, experience, trans-Atlantic travels, and political strategies—problematises the notion of the *ciudad letrada* put forth by Angel Rama, who saw it as a domain only for the expressions of colonial Spanish and creole elites. This book has demonstrated that elite Indians and mestizos made inroads into that sphere—however contentiously—by making their voices heard in the *audiencias*, the royal courts of Madrid, and the ecclesiastical councils and even attempting to reach the Vatican. The intertextual relationship between Andean discourses and European Scholastic traditions of political theology along with the common trope of *agravios y vejaciones*, in both Andean scholarship and the discourses of creoles and Bourbon administrators, also prompts Andeanists to expand Mary Louis Pratt’s notion of the “Contact Zone” (see Chapter 1) to allow for the joined textual production and intellectual and political collaboration/contention among educated Andeans, creoles, Spaniards, and ecclesiastics.

Simultaneously, the examination of Andean intellectual culture calls us to further identify cultural and intellectual bridges between the two “republics.” The use of the term “Andean” in this work speaks to the recognition of the increasing presence of mestizos and some creole supporters in the world of Andean elites as colonial times moved forward and also problematises a common assumption that mestizos sought unproblematically to separate themselves from the Indian world. The mestizo writers studied here—including Fray Calixto, Cuevas Herrera, and Núñez Vela de Rivera—strove to present themselves as legitimate members of the Indian world, as nobles of the “Indian nation” and descendants of the “gentiles,” and their proposals spoke as much in favor of the native elites as they did of their mestizo descendants. In short, educated mestizos were in truth colonial Andean actors who presented themselves as both “Indian” and “Christian.” In particular, Fray Calixto’s claims for nobility and access to religious power for Indians and mestizos revealed the historical changes in, and expansion of, the Indian world in the late colonial period. Likewise, the increasing visibility of intellectual Andeans in a social sphere in which colonial codes and power practices were exercised and disputed by Andeans and Europeans alike prompts us to recognize a new form of intercultural exchange that characterized colonial culture—one that challenges common understandings of colonial and Andean elites as operating in separate spheres, never to engage in a dialogic relationship or share intellectual interests and practices. This study has also demonstrated how indigenous and mestizo ladinos, with their critical texts and proposals, helped question the analytical value of the Habsburg notion of two separate republics, since their intellectual and social activism not only bridged the “two” worlds but also highlighted the power relationships that held them together and in which Andean leaders struggled to reconstitute their new sense of an ethnic community. This refashioning of
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ethnicity stimulates further research on, and problematization of, the meaning of “indigenous” in the late colonial period.

The various intersections and disjunctions between Andean and other colonial discursive streams attest to the ways Andean intellectuals engaged the institutional discourses of the colonial lettered world, while such discourses, in turn, appropriated Andeans’ knowledge to advance their institutional goals. Likewise, the intertextual relationships among Andean discourses from the early seventeenth century and those that constitute the focus of this work reveal the appropriation of early Andean scholars’ discursive elaborations by their later counterparts, as they resituated Inca Garcilaso de la Vega’s rendition of Inca history to support the idea of the common past of the “Indian nation.” The writings examined in this book attest to the circulation of Garcilaso de la Vega’s *Comentarios reales de los Incas* in Andean intellectual circles for nearly two centuries after its publication. Limaylla, Cuevas Herrera, and Fray Calixto adopted and reformulated Garcilaso de la Vega’s rendition of the Incan past to reconstruct a common historical memory, cultural identity, and Andean religiosity as the “Indian nation” entered postcolonial times in the Andes. Garcilaso de la Vega’s efforts to establish parallels between Incan religion and European Christianity were echoed, with variations, by Cuevas Herrera, Juan Santos Atahualpa, and Fray Calixto. Late-colonial Andean scholars were proud of Garcilaso de la Vega’s scholarly achievements and prestige and did not hesitate to cite him extensively. Although taken only fragmentarily, Garcilaso de la Vega’s scholarly work functioned as an authoritative source of Andean collective memory beyond the confines of the Cusco area and was used to empower the common cultural identity of Andeans of various ethnicities in the mid- and late years of Spanish colonialism in the Andes.

Thus, the *ciudad letrada* in colonial Peru was not only the chorus of colonial elites’ harmonic voices. It was also a multi-vocal space in which the voices of intellectual Indian elites, mestizos, and Africans from various regions of the Viceroyalty of Peru disputed their own places to introduce a necessary counterpoint or dissonance in the midst of otherwise apparently undisputed colonial relationships of power.

NOTE