

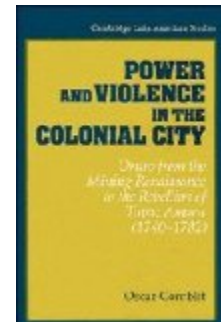
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Oscar Cornblit. *Power and Violence in the Colonial City: Oruro from the Mining Renaissance to the Rebellion of Tupac Amaru (1740-1782)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. x + 230 pp. \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-44148-3.

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“behind the causes they pretend they are arguing, it is easy to discover their inflamed passions” (p. 77).—Pedro Romero, Jesuit rector in Oruro, 1746

From 1780 to 1782 as many as 100,000 people died in the Tupac Amaru rebellion in what is now southern highland Peru and northwestern Bolivia. This was a defining moment in Andean history, comparable in its scope and severity to the 1791 to 1804 Haitian Revolution in the Caribbean. In 1970 Oscar Cornblit (1970a) wrote a pioneering study which looked at the geographical scope of the rebellion, and came to the influential conclusion that the “rebellions spread like wildfire throughout those regions where the proportion of foreign Indians was highest” (1970a:43). This situated the *forasteros*, or migrant Native Andeans no longer living with their original kin groups, as key players in what amounted to a civil war. At the end of his 1970 article he pointed out that “one of the most interesting foci of revolt was Oruro, where a significant proportion of the higher classes were leaders in the revolt” (1970a:44). It is Oruro as a case study that he turns to in his current monograph, with his 1970 article as “in many ways the point of departure for the present book” (p. ix).

This volume addresses the period from 1740 to 1782 in Oruro, looking at the events leading up to the 1780-1782 rebellion led by the Rodriguez brothers, and touching on the aftermath of that rebellion. In the late 1960s and early 1970s Cornblit’s work emphasized a very positivist mathematical approach to historical research (1970b), but in his current book he instead proposes that through his narrative readers should construct their own “mental panorama of life in the city, of the relations among its inhabitants,” and that “this picture will vary according to

each reader’s subjective responses” (p. ix).

Cornblit is at the Torcuato Di Tella Institute in Buenos Aires, and his long-standing academic relationship with Torcuato S. Di Tella is an important part of his vision of historical processes. Di Tella, son of the Argentinean industrialist of the same name, is a sociologist whose 1985 *Sociologia de los procesos politicos* (translated in 1990 as *Latin American Politics*) gives a good overview of Di Tella’s sociological model for the analysis of Latin American history.

Di Tella and Cornblit hold similar views on the social processes that lead to rebellion. Di Tella believes that in the developing world “peasants and workers accumulate antagonisms, but without much autonomous organizational experience and with a tendency to volcanic, occasional, and violent action” (1990:21). In Latin America, political power is proposed to lie within coalitions between a social group with “low organization but high social mobilization” and a “mobilizational leader” who is usually elite, and always has high organizational skills (1990:46). In this way Di Tella can subsume Peronism and the Tupac Amaru rebellion under one rubric. Although it is never explicitly stated, it is clear that Cornblit’s current volume is an attempt to place late eighteenth-century Oruro into just such a model of political change.

Oruro was founded as a mining town in 1606 and was on the main route from the Pacific port of Arica to the silver mines at Potosi (pp. 6-8). At its apogee in the late seventeenth century it was the second largest production center for silver in the colonial Andes, and may have had a population of 80,000 (p. 9). Considering its immense economic importance within the colonial system, there has been little research completed on colonial Oruro, and

thus Cornblit's book is an important contribution, particularly as a comparison to the extensive work that has been published on colonial Potosi (Bakewell 1984, 1988; Cole 1985).

Cornblit's analysis of late eighteenth-century Oruro begins with two chapters which give an overview of Oruro's history, and clearly set out the system of colonial government, with a focus on the role of the *cabildo*, or municipal council, and its conflicts with the *corregidor*, or Crown representative in the town.

In chapters three through six archival documents from the Archivo Nacional de Bolivia are used to outline a 1741 court case and its fallout, in which the *corregidor* began a long series of interventions in the local power struggles over *cabildo* seats in Oruro. Cornblit creates a detailed picture of a town divided between two factions. The "Herrerists" were a group of creole families who were not the wealthiest miners in the city but were quite careerist in their search for political office. In opposition to the "Herrerists" was a group of very wealthy miners and mine financiers, who had held fewer political offices and were largely Spaniards (pp. 54-55). Unfortunately Cornblit has chosen to begin his narrative after the end of the 1739 Juan Velez de Cordoba conspiracy in Oruro, an incident which local people saw as the cause of the divisions in the town (p. 63).

Cornblit admits that these local rivalries may not be applicable to other colonial cities (p. 56), but they are important to his later portrayal of the 1780 to 1782 rebellion. Cornblit has used a variety of secondary works in his discussion of the relationship between local politics and Crown authority in the Andes (p. 4), but his research could also have benefited from reference to such recent contributions as Fisher et al.'s (1990) volume on the Bourbon reforms and insurrection.

In chapter seven the 1747 to 1781 period is briefly outlined, with a promise that this period in Oruro will be covered in a future publication (p. 81). In chapter eight Cornblit turns to the mining industry itself, and gives a thorough overview of mine production, emphasizing the differences between Potosi, where *mita* tribute labor was so important, and Oruro, where wage labor dominated, a topic covered for the seventeenth century by Ann Zulawski (1987). A key point for Cornblit's later argument is the founding of the "Silver Exchange Bank" in Potosi in 1747, an institution which allowed the miners' guild to take some of the financing of mining out of the hands of private financiers, and allowed small producers to operate mines. In Oruro in the mid to late eighteenth cen-

tury good ore was running out, and as the debt of miners skyrocketed, financiers took over more and more mines, with no "Exchange Bank" to protect smaller producers (pp. 102-107). By 1780 mining in Oruro had come under the control of a very few miners such as the Herrera and the Rodriguez families, and even they were in financial trouble (p. 108).

Chapters nine through twelve outline the all-important events of 1780 to 1782. Cornblit compares the two contemporary published versions of the event, and analyzes extensive testimony by participants in the rebellion held in the Argentinean Archivo General de la Nacion in Buenos Aires. The entire region was under great strain with the news of the Katari rebellion in Chayanta and the rebellion of Tupac Amaru in Cuzco. By the 1770s the *cabildo* was largely controlled by the creole Rodriguez family, who had taken over the role served earlier by the Herrerias. In the *cabildo* elections of January 1st, 1781 the Rodriguez faction was soundly defeated by their rivals, who had the support of the local *corregidor*. Political tensions reached a fever pitch over the next month, and on February 10, 1781 the creole militia, which had been assembled by the *corregidor* for defense against a rumored Indian attack on Oruro, instead looted a Spanish shop and attacked several Spaniards. On February 12 rural Native Andeans entered the town to join with the creoles, and Jacinto Rodriguez was named the new *corregidor* by the assembled mass of people. Two days later the creole Rodriguez was himself hiding the remaining members of the Spanish faction in his house for protection from the Native Andeans, who demanded that all inhabitants of Oruro should switch to Native style clothing, and should chew coca in the streets. Rodriguez emerged wearing indigenous robes and shouting "Long Live Tupac Amaru." On February 15 his brother arrived, along with the *caciques* of neighboring Paria. From February until April strained relations between the Rodriguez brothers and the local Native leadership led to a Native blockade of the town, which ended only with the arrival of the Cochabamba militia in April 1781, whose presence dispersed the Native Andeans back to their villages (pp. 137-167).

Why Oruro? Why in February of 1781? Cornblit has created a series of vignettes that create an overall picture of several causative factors for the rebellion. The simmering hostilities between the creoles and Spaniards over control of the town *cabildo* are explicitly placed within Di Tella's (1990) idea of "status incongruence," a dichotomy between wealthy Spanish entrepreneurs with ties to the Crown, and the less wealthy group of creole miners in

control of the local *cabildo* (pp. 30-32). Petty rivalries turned to desperation on the part of the creoles as the mining economy deteriorated, and the lack of a stabilizing force like the "Silver Exchange Bank" meant that by 1780 the last of the mining families were watching their considerable fortunes dissolve. By 1771 the Herrera family no longer brought silver to be cast, and from 1776 to 1780 the Rodriguez family's silver production went into a disastrous tailspin (pp. 108-109). By the time of the uprising these families had lost control of the *cabildo* and had nothing to lose, so they joined with the Native forces (p. 138).

In this we see a specific instance of what Cornblit pinpointed in his 1970 article as the essential alliance between "lower dispossessed and displaced Indians" and the "threatened higher classes" in organizing the rebellions of 1780 to 1782 (1970:44). His work follows a long tradition of historians, such as Boleslao Lewin (1957), who have characterized the rebellions as a reaction to Bourbon political centralization and attempts to increase colonial revenue generation.

The participation of *forasteros* and other "displaced" Native Andeans is a key factor in Cornblit's hypothesis, as he maintains that "the rebellions spread like wildfire through those regions that presumably had the largest number of 'migrant' Indians" (p. 126). He refers to them as the "least integrated group" in late eighteenth-century Oruro (p. 127), and, following Di Tella's hypotheses on political change, it was the *forasteros* who would have been most susceptible to charismatic leadership in fomenting rebellion.

The Native Andeans surrounding Oruro in 1781 underwent a "sudden transformation," from "tribute-paying, submissive Indians into columns of thousands of silent, armed combatants, guided by their own banners and trumpets, standing on a hill to then charge without mercy on the despised city of the whites" (p. 143).

For this reviewer there is a missed opportunity in Cornblit's analysis of the participation of Native Andeans in the Oruro rebellion. It seems unclear that all Oruro *forasteros* were without community ties. Ann Zulawski (1987:423-425) has asserted that many late seventeenth-century Oruro *forasteros* still paid tribute to their village leaders, and may have had access to land in their home villages. Magnus Morner's parish-by-parish analysis of the Cuzco area showed that participants in the Tupac Amaru rebellion were much more likely to be non-*forasteros* from smaller high altitude villages with few outsiders living among them (Morner and Trelles, 1987).

This has led Morner to the conclusion that the key factor for rebellious Native Andeans in Cuzco may have been their ties to traditional communities which were least affected by the colonial economic system. For the rebellion in Oruro, Fernando Cajias (1983) has pointed out that the most radical Native rebels were from the poor towns to the north of Oruro, while those from Challapata and southern towns were wealthier, maintained ties to creoles like the Rodriguez family, and did not participate to the same degree in the rebel activities (Cajias, 1983:416). Cornblit does not address Morner or Cajias' work in the current volume.

The inclusion of extensive appendices gives the reader an opportunity to look at the fascinating testimonies of participants from all sides in the events of 1780 to 1782 (pp. 173-209). Native testimonies portray a desire to obliterate the city and retake their lands in preparation for the coming of Tupac Amaru from Cuzco, from whom they had received several missives urging revolt (pp. 178-192). It is clear that in Oruro ideas of a return to Inka sovereignty still rang true in the eighteenth century, as was first pointed out by John Rowe (1954) as an explanation for the Tupac Amaru rebellions. Works such as that of Rowe, as well as Morner and Trelles (1987) and Campbell (1987) would have been useful additions to Cornblit's analysis of the Native participation in the Oruro uprising.

Overall, *Power and Violence in the Colonial City* presents the first English-language monograph of a late eighteenth-century Bourbon rebellion in a mining town in the Andes. This is an excellently translated and well-edited volume; the addition of a glossary might have been helpful, but all non-English terms are clearly defined in the body of the text. The maps, figures, and tables are all clear and concise, and provide a good supplement to the text. Cornblit has done an exemplary job of outlining the complex economic and political divisions among Spaniards and creoles leading up to the rebellion. The volume is detailed, and probably not appropriate as an undergraduate text, but it is an important contribution to Andean mining, political, and resistance history, and should be included in any serious library focusing on Latin America.

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