Rebellions in Late Colonial Spanish America: 
a Comparative Perspective

ANTHONY McFARLANE
University of Warwick, UK

Until the last half-century of Spanish rule, large-scale popular rebellion was all but unknown in Spanish America. During the mid-seventeenth century, the Spanish Habsburg monarchy had suffered several serious challenges to its authority in its European realms, with rebellions in Catalonia and Portugal in 1640, Naples and Palermo in 1647, and, to a lesser extent, Andalusia in 1650–1651. Spain’s American dominions had, however, been undisturbed by disorders of comparable magnitude. Major riots occurred in Mexico City in 1624 and 1698, but Spanish America saw no great regional uprisings of the kind that shook the Habsburg monarchy in Europe until long after the accession of the Bourbon dynasty to the Spanish throne in 1700.

During the eighteenth century, this political pathology was transformed. Under Bourbon rule, and especially after 1760, Spanish America witnessed rebellions on a scale that were without precedent in its previous history. The recent historiography on late colonial Spanish America suggests, furthermore, that the eighteenth century, particularly its latter half, saw a general growth in the incidence of civil disorder in colonial societies, notably in Quito, Peru, New Granada and Mexico. Most of these disorders were of the small, spontaneous, highly localised kind frequently found in ancien régime societies; they consisted mainly of riots and revolts staged by peasants and, less frequently, by townspeople and miners. Such collective actions were generally directed against tax collectors, local officials who abused their power, intruders onto community lands, or arose from rivalries with neighbouring communities. Typically, such disturbances were on a small scale, and were of short range and duration. Sometimes, however, they took on a more impressive form, when groups of villages formed alliances to pursue common goals, or when native peoples banded together to fight in ethnic or ‘caste’ wars. Very occasionally, lower-class protests merged with those of other social groups to produce rebellions of sufficient scale and duration to challenge colonial government directly, either by seeking to modify its policies or to alter the distribution of power within the state.

Such rebellions were rare. During the last half-century of uninterrupted Spanish rule in America, from 1760 and 1810, only four major rebellions of this type took place. The first occurred in 1765, when the city of Quito, capital of the audiencia of Quito, was convulsed by two great riots which sent...
thousands of people from the plebeian quarters onto the streets to attack royal property and officials; these attacks led, during the latter half of that year, to the virtual suspension of royal government and its temporary replacement by an informal government run by the people of the city itself. The second great moment of rebellion came in 1780-1782, when the uprising led by Túpac Amaru in the region of Cuzco initiated a prolonged and bloody insurrection which spread through several areas of Peru and Upper Peru before it was finally suppressed by military force. Over the whole course of this uprising, sometimes known as the ‘Great Rebellion’, tens of thousands of people, mostly Indian peasants, were at different moments caught up in violent struggles that caused a heavy death toll. The third major insurrection took place at the same time as that of Túpac Amaru, when the Comunero uprising broke out at the centre of the Viceroyalty of New Granada in 1781.

At its height, the rebellion saw the mobilisation of a rebel force that was said to have been 20,000 strong, and, after threatening the viceregal capital, the rebels forced the colonial authorities to capitulate to their demands. Finally, after a long respite, Spanish colonial government faced another massive popular upheaval in Mexico in 1810, when Father Hidalgo launched a rural insurrection that rapidly gathered an unusual strength and ferocity. Again, a great regional insurrection took place, mobilising thousands of peasants and plebeians in a violent uprising which, after initial defeat, was succeeded by a prolonged insurgency that took on the character of a civil war.

Each of these rebellions has attracted considerable attention from historians, and we have a reasonably clear idea of their specific characteristics. What is less clear, however, is how these rebellions resembled or differed from each other; even less obvious is how they might compare with the rebellions that took place in other regions of the Atlantic world during the late eighteenth century, whether in Europe or the Americas. This paper will focus on the first of these issues. Here, I will attempt a brief comparative conspectus of rebellion in late colonial Spanish America, focusing on the four large, cross-class uprisings that challenged colonial governments at different times and places between 1760 and 1810. My purpose is to set these disparate events and occasions within a broad framework, and, by mapping out their forms and features, to identify similarities and differences, and parallels or patterns that might link them, whether in origins, aims or outcomes.

In a rare attempt to present a unified account of eighteenth-century Spanish American rebellions, Joseph Pérez suggests that they be divided into two broad phases. The first took place before 1765: it includes the rebellions of the Comuneros of Paraguay in the 1720s, and the rebellion against the Caracas Company led by Juan Francisco de León in Venezuela in 1749-1752. These rebellions, Pérez affirms, were essentially creole protests against powerful economic monopolies in their respective regions and had no relation to independence. A second, quite different ‘wave’ of rebellion came in the latter half of the century, formed by the rebellions of Quito, the Comuneros of New Granada, and Túpac Amaru in Peru. According to Pérez, these differed from earlier rebellions in two vital respects: first, they were popular movements in which ‘el protagonista de la rebelión es el pueblo, la plebe, la masa’; second, they were precursors of independence because their par-
participants showed a clear awareness that their interests differed from those of the metropolis.\textsuperscript{7}

This typology is weak in several respects. While it is reasonable to distinguish the post-1765 rebellions from earlier rebellions on the grounds of differences in their scale and social composition, Pérez’s interpretation of their character, content and meaning is rather rudimentary. One deficiency lies in his analysis of the social content of the late eighteenth-century rebellions. It is not clear from his analysis how these insurrections—which merged the discontents of disparate groups into common movements of rebellion—were organised and articulated into cross-class coalitions. A second problem with Pérez’s reading of the rebellions is that, while he rightly dismisses the notion that the rebellions were informed or motivated by the ideas of the European Enlightenment, he tells us very little about the ideas revealed by the rebellions, and implies that they were largely devoid of any systematic or coherent body of political thought. Another problem is that Pérez ignores the perceptions of the peasants and plebeians who gave the great insurrections their popular character. By assuming that they were simply reacting against economic exploitation, he neglects the possibility that the rebellion of the common people was informed by its own distinctive vision of society. Finally, Pérez deals only with the rebellions of the eighteenth century, apparently assuming that the great Mexican insurrection of 1810 had nothing in common with those which preceded it in other parts of Spanish America.

What, then, were the similarities and differences between the rebellions that took place between 1760 and 1810, and what, if anything, did they have in common? There were of course differences in their form, since they arose in distinctive socio-economic settings. The Quito rebellion of 1765 was an urban insurrection that recruited its main force from among the mestizos of the city’s barrios. The Comunero rebellion of 1781 blended urban and rural rebellion. The core of the movement was in the town of Socorro, with the small towns of the neighbouring region taking up supporting roles, and additional forces being drawn from the poor white and mestizo peasants who lived in the vicinity of these small provincial towns. Indians were also recruited to the rebellion, but were an adjunct to the main movement; a number of black slaves were involved in one area of the rebellion, but their number was too small to affect the movement’s character as a whole. The Great Rebellion initiated by Túpac Amaru in 1780 had a more definite rural character and a sharper ethnic definition. It originated among Indian villagers in the Cuzco region and, as it spread among the Quechua and Aymara-speaking Indian communities of rural southern Peru and Upper Peru, became increasingly identified as an Indian rebellion, with some of the characteristics of a race war. Borne on a groundswell of peasant rebellion that originated in the Bajío, the Hidalgo rebellion in Mexico also bears some of the marks of a movement of countryfolk against the city, and of Indian peasants against whites. It was, however, based in a region that was very different in its social and economic structures from those which supplied the Andean rebellion, and it recruited from an Indian population that was more Hispanicised than were most of the communities from which the great Andean rebellion took its followers.
Differences in the social composition of the rebellions were matched by variations in their scale, scope, duration and impact. Although the Quito rebellion affected the villages within the city’s immediate area, the uprising was largely contained within an urban precinct; it was built around two short, explosive outbreaks of violence, in the form of riots that required little formal organisation and caused little bloodshed. The Comunero rebellion had an impact over a much larger region, generated a longer, more organised rebel mobilisation which lasted for several months, and took the form of an ‘army’ that moved against the capital, Santa Fe de Bogotá. This force was structured into local contingents led by captains who came under a high command, but, for all its military appearance, in the end brought little bloodshed. The rebellion associated with the name of Túpac Amaru, on the other hand, affected a number of discrete regions and had several different leaders, lasted for about two years, involved considerable violence, and brought a long and bloody repression. The rebellion started by Hidalgo affected quite a large region, too, as it spread through the Mexican Bajío, but tended to lose strength when it moved outside this region into central Mexico. The initial rebellion was also quite short-lived; after some months of violent assaults on towns and estates in the Bajío, the rebels moved towards Mexico City only to be defeated by royalist forces. Hidalgo’s rebellion outlived his capture and execution, however, just as the Great Rebellion of the Andes continued after Túpac Amaru’s death. After Hidalgo’s defeat came a protracted insurgency that spread into southern Mexico and brought a long and bitter conflict before it was eventually defeated by government military forces.

Despite such differences, there were some striking parallels between the four rebellions. Most obvious is that all involved popular uprisings on an extraordinary scale, which went far beyond that of the typical village riot or revolt, but it was not simply the sheer scale of participation which distinguished these rebellions from the larger pattern of civil disorders during the late colonial period. They were also qualitatively distinct in that they involved the participation of members of different social groups, ranging across the social and ethnic hierarchy to include whites, mestizos, Indians and even, in the Comunero rebellion of New Granada, a small number of black slaves. Equally, if not more important, was the fact that these rebellions all reflected the hierarchical character of their societies: all were generally led, at least in their initial stages, by members of local elites and were bound by vertical ties of clientage and patronage that linked plebeian and patrician. In Quito, New Granada, Peru and Mexico, creoles played leading roles in the organisation of opposition to colonial government. In Peru, creole leadership was less prominent, but the social elites were well represented in the leadership by privileged members of Indian society, the Andean kurakas who stood apart from the mass of the native peasantry.

The convergence of popular uprising with protest from members of the privileged groups in society was mirrored in the development of the rebellions. In all of them, the prelude to open, mass-based rebellion lay in challenges to government authority from local elites. In Quito, the first riot of 1765 was preceded by a campaign of patrician resistance to Bourbon administrative reform, organised through the institutions of municipal
government. In New Granada in 1781, the pattern was somewhat different, as the first reaction to fiscal reform was expressed at the popular level, in a chain of small provincial riots. However, to transform these riots into open insurrection required the intervention of members of the provincial gentry, who had their own grievances against the reforms, shared with sympathetic creole patricians in the viceregal capital. In Peru, rural insurrection on a grand scale was also preceded by a series of urban riots and conspiracies which, though they expressed popular rejection of fiscal reform, enjoyed the sympathy and sometimes—as in Arequipa and Cuzco in 1780—the organised leadership of groups within creole society.\(^9\) Conditions in Mexico in 1810—at the moment when Spanish metropolitan government had virtually broken down and the legitimacy of Spanish rule was itself called into question—seem very different. Yet here, too, we find a similar pattern in the genesis of mass rebellion. Following creole conflict with the authorities in the capital—over demands for a change in government rather than simply opposition to fiscal reform—elements in the provincial creole gentry organised a resistance to colonial government which triggered and merged with a rebellion from below.\(^10\)

If there were some similarities in the structure, organisation and process of the rebellions, can we see any correspondence in their origins and intentions? At first sight, there seems to be a clear separation between the late eighteenth-century rebellions of Spanish South America and the Hidalgo rebellion in early nineteenth-century Mexico. While the former all coincide with Bourbon fiscal and administrative reforms, and can therefore be construed as defensive reactions against political innovation and fiscal reform, the Hidalgo rebellion seems to stand apart, as a movement for independence.

In fact, the rebellions share a broad similarity in terms of the political conditions in which they originated, in that all took place at moments of abrupt changes of policy in the Spanish state. The Quito rebellion occurred at the time of the first conjuncture of Caroline reformism, launched after the Treaty of Paris in 1763. Political innovation also triggered the Comunero rebellion and the Great Rebellion in Peru during the early 1780s, when visitadores-generales commissioned by the Crown attempted to reform the administration and exchequer in the viceroyalties of New Granada and Peru. The Hidalgo rebellion clearly corresponded to another conjuncture in the history of the colonial state, though of a different kind. Whereas previous rebellions were reactions to assertions of authority from the centre, the Hidalgo rebellion arose at a moment of crisis and weakness in the metropolis, following Napoleon’s invasion of Spain and usurpation of the Bourbon throne. However, it too should be seen primarily as a reaction against innovation. The reform of government by visitor-general Galvez in the 1770s had aroused strong creole resentment, and the wedge between creoles and Spanish colonial government had been driven deeper by Bourbon encroachments in Church wealth in the early 1800s. In this sense, then, the rebellions can be seen as part of a larger pattern, in that each coincided with a moment of change in the Spanish state, starting in the early 1760s with a growing assertion of authority and ending in 1810 with its dissolution.

If the rebellions may all be thought of as reactions to sudden changes in the
character of the colonial state, did they share any other causal characteristics? Clearly, the relationship of the rebellions to alterations in the policies and character of the Spanish state does not fully explain why or where they took place. After all, most of the colonies were affected by changes in colonial government during the reign of Charles III (1759–1788) and again when the Bourbon monarchy collapsed in 1808–1814, but only a few saw large-scale, multi-class rebellions. Other factors evidently played a part in determining responses to external political pressures, and if we are to find deeper patterns of cause, content or process in the rebellions, we must consider the social and economic conditions in which they emerged. We must also examine their aims and ideas. For, if the rebellions did not always formulate clear political programmes, then neither were they without ideas. The rebels' behaviour was moulded by their perceptions of the social and political world in which they lived, and their behaviour, in turn, reflected their attitudes and beliefs.

To examine the socio-economic and ideological contexts of the rebellions, we will distinguish between the motives, aims and activities of the different social groups involved in the rebellions. Let us begin, then, with the elites who provided them with their leadership and played a key role in defining their aims; we will return later to consider the problems and perceptions of the plebeians and peasants who gave the rebellions their force and momentum.

A distinguishing feature of the rebellions, which set them apart from the multitude of small civil disorders that took place in colonial societies, was the participation and leadership provided by members of local creole elites. One explanation of such creole involvement points to specific economic grievances. In Quito, the creole patriciate resisted the attempts of the viceroy in Bogotá to bring the aguardiente monopoly under direct royal administration, because it threatened a profitable area of activity for landowners, tax farmers and clerics at a time when the economy of the city was in decline due to the contraction of its traditional commerce with Peru. In New Granada, members of the provincial creole elites were ready to join with the Comuneros because their economic interests were threatened by royal fiscal and administrative reforms which inhibited their freedom to produce and to sell key commercial products, as well as threatening to deprive them of opportunities to hold lucrative offices within the colonial administration. In Peru, recent research has also revealed the damage inflicted on provincial elite interests by administrative and fiscal innovation. This was apparent as early as the 1730s when efforts to reform tribute collection and the mita under Viceroy Castelfuerte not only provoked local rebellions of Indians and mestizos, but also involved the clergy and provincial creoles in confrontations with government as they sought to protect themselves against fiscal and administrative changes which threatened their economic, social and political standing. It was, of course, even more apparent in the late 1770s and in 1780, when provincial creoles angered by reform of the alcabala were closely involved in a series of conspiracies, riots and rebellions—at Urubamba in 1777, at Arequipa and Cuzco in 1780—and in some of the phases of the Túpac Amaru rebellion. Finally, in New Spain, the readiness of the provincial creole gentry to embark on rebellion against the viceregal government of Mexico City in 1810 may also be explained, at least in part, by economic grievances. The impact of the con-
solidación de vales reales on the smaller landowners; the shortages of specie and goods and the profiteering of peninsular merchants; the increasing monopolisation of salaried posts in the administrative and ecclesiastical apparatus by peninsular immigrants: all helped to alienate the creole gentry and professional classes.\textsuperscript{15} According to Brian Hamnett, discrimination against creoles in government appointments was particularly destructive: 'in the jobs trauma of late Bourbon Mexico lay the origin of the political disidence of the "provincial bourgeoisie" and, ultimately, their readiness to inflame lower-class discontent against the Europeans'.\textsuperscript{18}

However, creole involvement in rebellion cannot be explained solely in economic terms. It was also driven by political dissatisfactions with the colonial regime, and informed by a distinctive vision of the constitution of the colonial order. Now, Spain's colonies had never had institutions for political representation of the kind found in Britain's American colonies, with their elected assemblies, nor did Spanish American share in a metropolitan political culture which stressed the liberties of the subject and curbed the power of the Crown. However, creoles had come to enjoy and expect a degree of participation in their own government, mainly because of the laxity of Habsburg administration which, while theoretically powerful, was in practice quite weak. Creoles had, moreover, come to identify with the lands in which they were born, and, in developing a 'creole patriotism', had adopted a view of Spain's American dominions as separate realms within the Hispanic monarchy which, no less than those in Europe, had their own customs and cultures, their own nobilities and governments, and, with these, a right to some autonomy.\textsuperscript{17}

The readiness of creoles to express and defend this position is demonstrated by John Phelan in his study of the Comunero rebellion in New Granada. His central hypothesis is that the Comunero movement was inspired by notions concerning the common good of the community, the rights of the community to express its interests in negotiation with royal government, and its right to defend those rights against abuse, by force if necessary. By analysing Comunero slogans and rhetoric, Phelan detected connections and continuities with political ideas and conventions present in the writings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish writers, and he argued that this political thought had been transmitted to creoles through the practices of Habsburg government. In this view, the Comunero rebellion was essentially a defensive response to Bourbon encroachments on the customary freedoms of the community; it was an attempt to preserve an existing order, conceived in the constitutional ideas of the Spanish Golden Age and reinforced by the obdurate provincialism of creoles who were determined to retain local privilege and autonomy.\textsuperscript{18}

Although Phelan's analysis focuses solely on the Comunero rebellion, it also throws light on the ideologies which informed the other major rebellions of the late colonial period. This is perhaps most apparent in the case of the Quito rebellion of 1765. If it is clear that the urban elites opposed reform partly in order to defend their economic interests, the means by which they did so and the arguments which they deployed also projected a view of a constitutional order. This view was not elaborated in a coherent programme
comparable to the capitulations of the Comuneros, but it was reflected in the style and content of their campaign against the new Crown policy. Thus, for example, Quito's patricians claimed the right to participate in government as the representative of the community as a whole, and, to do so, they convoked a cabildo abierto. This was an institution which, by its very nature, embodied notions of urban autonomy and enshrined the concept of government by negotiation, rather than government by arbitrary Crown dictate. The patriciate also argued that the leading members of the community, gathered in the cabildo abierto, might represent the 'public good' in order to influence royal policy, and they denounced the reform as detrimental to the public good.

Finally, throughout their deliberations, the creole patriciate expressed a notion of what constituted good and just government, implicitly appealing to a view of the state that saw government as a contractual relationship between prince and people, and calling for recognition of the need to observe local needs and customs. There was, then, an important political dimension to the conflict over fiscal reform in Quito. If the city's rebellion was triggered by anti-fiscalism, it also challenged the Crown's right to modify the fiscal system in disregard of local interests, and pressed the creole patriciate's right to consultation and consent in the process of government. In this sense, it is fair to say that the dispute in Quito was a striking and earlier exemplar of that 'indigenous tradition of no taxation without bureaucratic representation' that John Phelan found at the centre of the later Comunero rebellion. Like the Comunero leadership in 1781, the Quichua leadership in 1765 drew on an ideological tradition fed, not by the European Enlightenment, but by the concepts and conventions of Hispanic political theory of the Golden Age. Theirs was not a defiance of the Crown; it was an attempt to use and defend against Bourbon innovation an existing, implicit constitutional order inherited from Habsburg practice of government by negotiation.19

While Peru's creoles, like those of other regions of the Spanish Americas, had developed some sense of a separate identity during the seventeenth century, it is difficult to trace the thought and attitudes of the creole elites in eighteenth-century Peru, as we have no systematic study of creole political behaviour for this period.20 Examination of creole actions in the Peruvian rebellions of the Bourbon period nevertheless suggests that there too creoles resisted the demands of metropolitan government partly by appealing to colonial rights to participate in government. Thus, for example, in the disturbances that took place in Cochabamba in 1730, one rebel proposition was that 'the corregidor should not be a Spaniard, the alcaldes should be creoles and they should be able to appoint the revisador themselves ... and that, after fulfilling these terms, they would all join together to increase his Majesty's income'.21 The manifesto of the Oruro rebellion of 1739 also stressed creole rights to a role in government, pointing out, somewhat ambiguously, that 'the eminent creoles and the poor Indians were both legitimate lords of their land' and calling on creoles to take up positions in a new local government.22 And, as Scarlett O'Phelan has argued, creole discontent reached its peak in 1780. For, while creoles had previously been able to gain access to power by holding local offices, by the 1770s creoles were being challenged and displaced by peninsulars from even these positions.
Thus the anti-creole policy at the level of the audiencia, where creoles were being purged from office, also had a counterpart in the provinces. Opposition to such usurpation was reflected in the prominent part played by creoles in the rebellions at Urubamba in 1777, in Arequipa in 1780, in the Cuzco conspiracy of 1780 and, still more clearly, in creole collusion in the first phase of the Túpac Amaru rebellion in 1780–1781.

Although creoles were involved in the leadership, the Túpac Amaru rebellion was basically an Indian uprising, led by Indian caciques who, as Scarlett O’Phelan has shown, were linked by ties of kinship. We must therefore consider the possibility that the rebellion was influenced by ideas quite different from those which shaped creole political attitudes and behaviour, ideas which drew on Indian culture and experience and envisaged a past and future different from that of creole society. Stern, for example, has argued that the rebellion of Túpac Amaru drew on ideological roots which were distinctively Indian: in his view, its leaders shared messianic ideas of an Andean utopia that were already present in the earlier rebellion of Juan Santos Atahualpa in the 1740s. Campbell concurs with this judgement, arguing that the Great Rebellion might best be understood as ‘the culmination of a series of messianic, nativist, neo-Inca protests’ that had taken place in preceding decades.

We shall return to the question of native ideology and the ‘Andean utopia’ later, but for the moment we should note that in its opening stages, when under Túpac Amaru’s leadership, the Great Rebellion displayed a structure and mentality which gave it much in common with the other late colonial rebellions. First, it is clear that this, the greatest of the Peruvian rebellions, coincided with an intense attack on the patrimonial system of government, spearheaded by Areche’s visita general, and that this gave creoles a clear motive for allying with Indian leaders to protect the threatened order. Secondly, it is also clear that, by reason of his social position and connections, Túpac Amaru himself was well acquainted with creole views. Indeed, there are strong suggestions that his writings were much influenced by the clergy. Furthermore, the behaviour and pronouncements of Túpac Amaru indicate that he certainly perceived a conviction among creoles that they had a right to share in government under the Crown and to reject both ministers and measures which did not accord with their interests. Thus he appealed to them to co-operate ‘as brothers and members of one body ... my only purpose being to attack the bad government of so many thieving drones who rob the honey from our hives’. In the discourse which he directed towards the creoles, and which he evidently expected to receive a sympathetic reception, Túpac Amaru used a language which attacked the peninsulars and the innovations which they had brought as the root of conflict in Peru, and promised political reforms—including the demand for the establishment of an audiencia in Cuzco—that would afford creoles an improved position in the political order.

Finally, it might be argued that the ‘Inca nationalism’ which John Rowe identified as an ideological source for Túpac Amaru’s rebellion, at least among the Indian leadership, was itself influenced by the constitutional traditions and practices of Habsburg government. Because it originated among the Indian
nobility, composed of caciques accustomed to share in colonial government, at least one important strand of the discourse of Túpac Amaru was shaped by the Habsburg political theory and practice which formed the basis of that government. Indeed, it can be argued that the indigenous leadership was especially wedded to the traditional Spanish colonial state, and felt particularly threatened by Bourbon reformism. For, having been accorded an institutional space in which to collaborate with colonial officials and to broker relations between the colonial state and the indigenous communities, Andean chiefs saw that space eroded by the changing relations of mercantile exploitation that arose under a Bourbon regime that was primarily interested in expanding commerce and revenues.

Nor was this overlap between the thinking and attitudes of the Indian and creole elites simply a one-way traffic: as Flores Galindo has shown, Indian thinking also entered the creole world, where, in the 1805 conspiracy in Cuzco, the utopian idea of an Inca restoration informed an attempt to overthrow Spanish government. Indeed, Scarlett O'Phelan has even questioned the belief that the idea of an independent Inca state came from Indians, noting that creoles as well as Indian caciques in the Andean south regarded themselves as descendants of the Incas.

If we now turn to our last case—that of the Hidalgo rebellion of 1810—the inspiring influence of the belief that creoles had the right to participate in government and to enjoy a degree of autonomy within the empire again stands out. By 1810, the influence of the Enlightenment was considerably stronger than in the 1780s, and, after the American and French revolutions, ideas of popular sovereignty and individual liberty had penetrated creole political thinking. The traditional idea of the American colonies as 'kingdoms' within the Spanish empire, rightfully represented by creoles, was nevertheless still strong in Mexico, where a sense of Mexicanness was shored up by a long and literate tradition of 'creole patriotism' and popularised by the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe. When the Mexico City council demanded the right to participate in government after the fall of Ferdinand, it appealed to traditional contractual doctrine, claiming that sovereignty had reverted to the people on the abdication of the king, and that, as a true kingdom, New Spain now had the right to self-government. In addition, although Hidalgo himself was a man steeped in the ideas of the Enlightenment, his co-conspirators and the priests who rallied their parishioners to his cause were probably more attached to defending corporate privilege and the Church than to seeking national sovereignty and individual rights. It was only when the rebellion started by Hidalgo extended into a protracted insurgency and spread to the Mexican south under Morelos's leadership that it took on a more modern, radical flavour. For, while Morelos followed Hidalgo in espousing the defence of the Church and traditional corporate privileges, he also demanded racial equality and a new political order based on the sovereignty of the people and exercised by an elected national congress (like that which he first convened at Chilpancingo in 1813).

It seems, then, that the ideology of the leaders of the late colonial rebellions drew on similar creole ideas, ideas which combined medieval contractualism with articulation of the social identity of American Spaniards. In this sense, though they were widely separated in time and/or space,
and had distinctive social compositions and forms of organisation, the rebellions seem to have a common ideological thread running through them. All the rebellions involved what can best be described as disputes over the constitutional order of the colonial regime. This dispute was not elaborated in precise doctrinal formulations, but, in the participation of provincial creole elites (and Indian caciques in Peru), we can detect traces of a political thought which implicitly rejected Bourbon absolutism in its colonial form. This did not entail the rejection of the king, still less abjure the principle of monarchy. It did, however, claim representation for local notables in government, rights to negotiation within the colonial administration, and a right to act as a representative voice for the whole hierarchy of a colonial body politic that was divided by race and function. In this sense, the rebellions all reflect a belief in a 'colonial pact', through which creoles understood and legitimated their protests to the Crown. Even Bolívar, the child of the Enlightenment and a convinced republican, was ready to acknowledge and appeal to the belief in such a pact when, in the Jamaica letter, he recalled that Spain had betrayed the pact by which Charles V had recognised the right of the conquistadors and their descendants to be lords of the lands they had conquered.35

So far I have focused on the sources of creole dissent and on the features common to the creole protests which surfaced in the rebellions; I have also stressed the part which they played as catalysts for rebellion. However, such protest was not in itself sufficient to generate rebellion; to create movements of the force and scope of those which occurred in Quito, New Granada, Peru and Mexico, creole dissent had to interact with popular grievances expressed in plebeian or peasant revolts. An effective comparison of the rebellions must, then, explore the motives, intentions and forms of the popular insurrections which underpinned the rebellions. We might also ask the question that if there was a common pattern of creole thinking which justified rebellion as the defence of a colonial pact, can we also find any unifying patterns in the motives, behaviour and attitudes of the peasants and plebeians who constituted the mass force of the rebellions?

In terms of their causes, the popular uprisings involved in the late colonial rebellions seem to fall into two broad categories, according to their social settings and their immediate causes. The Quito rebellion of 1765 stands apart in that it was the work of city plebe, and did not become an extensive regional rebellion. The other rebellions, by contrast, were preceded by disturbances in towns but recruited their main strength from the peasantry and spread over large areas of the countryside in New Granada, Peru and Upper Peru, and Mexico. Nevertheless, if we focus on the economic grievances which inspired popular revolt, some common features seem to link the urban insurrection of Quito in 1765 with the rural rebellions of New Granada and Peru in the early 1780s, in that all were triggered by changes in the fiscal policies of colonial government. The riots of Quito were sparked by reform of the aguardiente monopoly and, more importantly, by modifications in the range and management of the sales tax; in New Granada, the Comuneros protested against changes in the rules governing the sale and distribution of aguardiente and tobacco, as well as reform of the alcabala. Likewise in Peru, reforms
designed to enhance the fiscal yield of taxation by reorganisation of the state aguardiente monopoly and more efficient collection of the sales tax prompted both urban riots and rural revolt. At one level, then, popular participation in the eighteenth-century rebellions seems to share a common characteristic: it sprang from the protest of common people who were faced with tax changes that threatened to impose new economic burdens upon them, whether as producers or consumers. The Hidalgo rebellion, on the other hand, seems quite different, since it arose amidst a crisis of subsistence and high prices.

If we go beyond the immediate motives for popular insurrection to examine the economic contexts in which they occurred, however, the rebellions take on a broader resemblance and significance. Historians of the rebellions generally agree that resentment towards fiscal change was not enough to generate such widespread popular disturbances: this required the presence of other grievances associated with the condition of the local or regional economy. Emphasis on the economic determinants of the rebellions takes two basic forms. One interpretation, which draws on general theories of peasant rebellion in pre-industrial societies, suggests that the uprisings were related to deeper changes in the structures of social and economic life; the other focuses—more narrowly—on the importance of specific economic conjunctures. First, let us consider the structural contexts of rebellion, and ask if there is any underlying correlation between popular insurrection and long-term shifts in socio-economic structures.

The structuralist model of explanation stresses the pressures generated by demographic growth and/or the spread of commercial agriculture as prime causes of social instability: both alter the distribution of resources between individuals and groups, creating or accentuating conflicts over resources. Systemic change involving greater commercialisation of agriculture may also multiply the occasions for conflict in that, by bringing more of the peasantry into contact with markets and wage labour, it leads to differentiation and division within peasant communities and makes peasants more sensitive to conjunctural changes in market conditions. As peasants are subject to the market, so they become more vulnerable to its volatilities in terms of fluctuations in prices and wages, and, by extension, more prone to violent collective protest.

In his analysis of modern peasant movements, Eric Wolf has also identified the ‘middle peasant’ as the principal agent of rural unrest in agrarian structures penetrated by the spread of commercial capitalism. According to Wolf, the rich peasantry who have benefited from market opportunities and exercise power within the village community have no incentive to rebel, while poor peasants or landless labourers lack sufficient resources to sustain a struggle, unless helped by some external force. The ‘middle peasantry’, on the other hand, because it holds lands of its own and cultivates with family labour, has sufficient economic independence to challenge changes which threaten its economic interests. Paradoxically, then, this type of peasant—whose social relations are closest to those of the traditional autonomous landholding community—is potentially the most radical opponent of the established social order. Equally, peasants in peripheral areas which are only
loosely controlled from the outside also have a 'tactical mobility' which permits them to resist when threatened by economic change.\textsuperscript{36}

Is there any evidence that such structural changes created the conditions for the popular insurrections of the late colonial period? The clearest case is that of Hidalgo's rebellion, since it occurred in the Bajio region where the peasantry was adversely affected by the effects of demographic growth and commercialisation of agriculture. Comparison with the other late colonial rebellions does not, however, provide uniform evidence that they arose in similar agrarian structures, or that the main actors conformed to the type suggested by Wolf.

Consider the Socorro region of New Granada. The heartland of the Comunero rebellion, this area did indeed have a high proportion of small, independent peasant landowners, living outside landlord control and thus presumably enjoying the 'tactical mobility' required to engage in rebellion. However, the principal threat to this peasantry came from taxation which threatened to bear down upon their cash cropping, rather than from the pressures of an expanding commercial estate agriculture.\textsuperscript{37} If we turn, secondly, to the southern Andean highlands, scene of the Great Rebellion of 1780-1782, we find a rentier agriculture of landed estates juxtaposed with autonomous Indian landholding peasant communities which, again, were 'tactically mobile'. Nevertheless, the agrarian society of the huge area eventually affected by the Great Rebellion also included a dispossessed peasantry of forasteros who did not belong to such communities, and yet also played a part in the insurrection. Admittedly, the role of the forasteros was not so central to the rebellion as was once suggested by Oscar Cornblit, who portrayed these landless migrants as the main insurrectionary force.\textsuperscript{38} However, though there is no invariable correlation of areas with high proportions of forasteros with zones of rebellion, the fact remains that in some regions where rebellion occurred, the forasteros did constitute majorities.\textsuperscript{39} Nor was the pressure of capitalist agriculture the main source of grievance for peasant communities in Peru: of far greater importance were the depredations of the corregidores de indios, who preyed on the peasant surplus through forced sales of goods.\textsuperscript{40}

If neither the Comuneros nor the Great Rebellion of Túpac Amaru provide clear evidence for Wolf's thesis, nor does the Hidalgo rebellion. For while the pressures of demographic change and the spread of a commercial estate-based agriculture were clearly present in the regions affected by the rebellion, independent landholding peasant communities were absent or in an advanced state of deterioration. The Bajio, epicentre of the rebellion, had never had a strong structure of such communities and, by the eighteenth century, was dominated by large, commercially oriented estates worked by dependent tenants and wage labourers.\textsuperscript{41} In the neighbouring region of Guadalajara, to which the rebellion spread, Indian landowning communities were threatened by the expansion of hacienda agriculture, but the main body of the rural work force was made up of resident peons, reliant on wages.\textsuperscript{42} In view of these differences, it is evidently difficult to establish any close correlation between the major rural uprisings and a specific type of agrarian structure, in which landed peasant communities were under severe pressure from demographic growth and agricultural commercialisation.
These criticisms do not mean, of course, that a general structuralist explanation is totally irrelevant. During the latter half of the eighteenth century, population growth combined with changes in the Spanish colonial system to impose new strains on inherited economic and political structures, and it may be that major rebellions occurred in regions which were most destabilised by such changes. Here we might distinguish between two types of socio-economic destabilisation. In the core regions of the empire, it arose from economic expansion, associated with closer commercial contact with Europe. In Peru, mercantile capitalists sought to extend markets for European imports by making more vigorous use of the system of repartos de efectos managed by the corregidores, so disturbing existing circuits in the region's economy and pressing more heavily on the peasants' surplus. In Mexico, Spanish mercantile capital also contributed to the silver-mining boom which was ultimately the driving force behind the expansion of urban markets and the development of estate agriculture that proved so deleterious to the peasantry of the north-centre of the country. In addition, as Brian Hamnett has observed, the economic dynamism of Mexico acted as a magnet to many small Spanish merchants who flocked to take advantage of the opportunities for profit which it offered and who, as middlemen and shopkeepers, became a source of hatred and division.43 Even in New Granada, which was much more isolated from the effects of expansion in the Atlantic economy, rebellion can be associated with social disruption caused by changes in the colonial system, insofar as the growth of the gold mining sector, fuelled by Spanish mercantile capital, had provided expanding markets for the products of the Socorro region and, by encouraging producers to rely on cash crops, made them more vulnerable to fiscal reform.44 In Quito, by contrast, changes in the colonial system disrupted the economy by bringing decline or stagnation rather than growth. Alterations in the organisation of transatlantic trade undermined Quito's long-established connections with the Peruvian market, causing important sectors of the highland economy to decay and stirring resentments towards both government and Spanish merchants.45 In this sense, then, it is possible to see popular participation in the major rebellions, as well as the many minor revolts which occurred during the later eighteenth century, as symptoms of long-term changes in social and economic structures.

Even if we accept this general framework, however, attention to economic conjunctures offers a sharper tool for understanding the economic causes of popular participation in the major rebellions. In the case of the Hidalgo rebellion, there is certainly strong evidence that short-term economic crisis precipitated popular agitation, since drought had pushed food prices to famine levels in the two years before the rebellion broke out. In the other areas where large-scale rebellion occurred, short-term economic crisis also occurred, though in much less severe forms. In Quito, there was a sharp downturn in the urban economy immediately before the rebellion of 1765, as a postwar trade boom increased the competition which textile producers suffered from Spanish imports. Short-term local economic difficulties also appear to have affected the Socorro region in the years prior to the Comunero rebellion, due to a smallpox epidemic and a succession of bad
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harvests.\textsuperscript{46} For the southern Andes, evidence that rebellion was prompted by short-term recession is harder to find, but it does seem that the economic burdens pressed on peasant communities by taxation and the \textit{reparto de efectos} became heavier and stimulated a rising tide of protest during the decade or so before the Great Rebellion.\textsuperscript{41} Thus a sense of relative deprivation, stemming from a recent deterioration in economic conditions (sharpened by the sudden threat of new taxation in the late eighteenth-century rebellions), seems to have been a common condition of the rebellions of the late colonial period.

However, while the conjunctural argument offers a sharper tool for analyzing the immediate causes of popular insurrection than does the broad structuralist approach, it still does not offer an adequate explanation of its occurrence. Such analyses show the character and causes of economic problems in a given time and place, but they tell us nothing of how they were perceived by the mass of people affected. There is no reason to suppose that the mass of people who participated in the rebellions were any less capable of understanding economic and political realities than were the creole elites who joined them, but the manner in which they did so may well have been different. Thus, while popular uprising must be placed in the context of long-term structural changes and their interplay with conjuncture and events, for a fuller understanding of its origins and significance we must also delve into the culture of common people, into the mental framework which gave meaning to their social experience and thereby shaped their behaviour. In short, when approaching popular insurrection, we must take account of the attitudes and beliefs of lower-class rebels, and enquire into the ways in which their perceptions influenced their actions.

When analysing creole participation in the rebellions, I have pointed to the belief in a colonial pact as a major ideological force for shaping and legitimating creole action. Can we also detect a pattern in the values and ideas which inspired and underpinned popular rebellion? At the outset, it is important to stress that popular rebellions were not devoid of ideas, and that their ideas were not necessarily supplied ‘from above’. We can detect these ideas in the behaviour of rioters and rebels: on closer examination, it invariably becomes clear that riotous and rebellious conduct was not simply random disorder or undisciplined violence, but was structured, restrained and targeted behaviour. Hence a good case can be made that popular rioting and rebellion was underpinned by a sense of legitimacy, a sense that common people could behave illegally when officials or governments transgressed established customs and norms. Here, as historians of Spanish America have recently discovered, the concept of a ‘moral economy’ offers a very useful point of departure. When originated by E. P. Thompson in his work on eighteenth-century English crowds, the notion of a ‘moral economy’ referred to the sense of legitimacy which bound bread rioters together in collective actions that were formally illegal, but which they felt were justified by the primacy of community rights to subsistence at a ‘just price’ over the rights of individual property owners freely to sell their goods in the market.\textsuperscript{48}

The concept of ‘moral economy’ has also taken on a wider applicability, thanks to its development by James Scott in his effort to explain the roots of
rebellion among peasants in Southeast Asia. Scott's basic argument is that, behind much of the technical and social organisation of peasant communities in a precapitalist order lies the principle of economic prudence, of putting economic security first. He suggests that, within such communities, there is a tendency towards redistribution. This does not mean that they are egalitarian; normally, there is an internal social hierarchy formed by differentiation of wealth and status. It means rather that there was an understanding of reciprocal obligations and a recognition that all should have the chance to survive from local resources. There is, in other words, an 'ethic of subsistence', by which the community acknowledges the right of all to subsist. Moreover, in communities of a corporate type, where individual property had not completely displaced communal property and where the community could allocate lands and distribute the demands imposed by external authorities, this ethic could be routinely translated into reality.

In Scott's view, this socio-economic principle has a profound influence on peasant mentality, for it structures relations both within the community and with the external agencies that impose demands upon it. The 'ethic of subsistence' gives rise to a pattern of expectations and a series of norms which provide a measure against which the demands of the state or the landlord may be evaluated. Peasant communities do not completely reject the demands imposed upon them by others. For various reasons—including the repressive power of privileged groups within the state—they accept as legitimate the appropriation of part of their economic surplus. For the peasant, the crucial question is not how much is taken, but how much is left. Thus, when external demands reach the point of threatening the basic economic security of the community, the peasantry becomes ready to rebel, because the demands placed upon it have passed a point regarded as legitimate. In this sense, peasant rebellions are essentially defensive: the peasant does not seek to change society, but to defend what he regards as rightfully his.

In the context of colonial Hispanic America, the concept of a 'moral economy' is useful in one important respect: it acts as a corrective to the assumption that popular riot and revolt were simply spontaneous spasms of violence, devoid of ideas and driven solely by economic desperation. As Scott declares, the idea of 'moral economy' encourages us to see how, in all its forms, collective peasant violence is structured by a moral vision, derived from experience and tradition, of the mutual obligations of classes in society. However, if we accept that the collective action of popular uprising was not a purely random and contingent response but reflects a popular consciousness, we must also seek to establish the particular features of that consciousness in different milieux. The emphasis on consciousness is valuable, but, given the distinctive social settings from which popular uprisings sprang in Quito, New Granada, Peru and Mexico, the local or regional character of popular discourse inevitably varied, and has to be specified.

The Great Rebellion of 1780–1782 in Peru certainly stands apart from the other rebellions, because of its strongly native, indeed nativist, character. In Quito and New Granada, the principal goal of both urban and rural rioters was to resist fiscal innovation in the form of state monopolies and new taxa-
tion of basic agricultural goods, and the political language of the rebels did not differ much from that of the creole leadership. In Peru, by contrast, the Great Rebellion seems to have incorporated a discourse that had meaning only to the Indian peasants and their leaders. This discourse appealed to an "Inca nationalism", in the sense that it projected Túpac Amaru as a monarch in his own right and cultivated the vision of the Inca past as a golden age, ruined by Spanish usurpation. This was, Jan Szeminski seeks to show, a mentality peculiar to the Indian peasantry and their leaders, an alternative vision of society that was founded and preserved in autochthonous religious practices which nurtured the belief that the world was out of balance, and that the Inca was a restoring force who could return the world to equilibrium and act as a saviour of the Indians. Here, then, insurrection seems to have been nurtured by a vision of the world that envisaged the overthrow of the Spaniards, particularly during the later phase of the rebellion associated with the leadership of Túpac Katari in Upper Peru, when Indian demands assumed a clearer priority over those of creoles and mestizos and when the attack on government extended into a conflict which, in its rhetoric and violence, took on the attributes of a race war.

In the Hidalgo rebellion in Mexico, we also find ideas that went beyond those inspired by the antifiscal and moral economy postures found in Quito and New Granada. Here Christian religious beliefs seem to shore up rebellion, in that the symbol of the rebels, wielded by Father Hidalgo to mobilise support for the creole conspiracy, was the banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe. What did this mean? Should it be considered simply as an instrument of manipulation, used to appropriate the legitimacy and power of the Church for elite purposes? Such an explanation is not entirely satisfactory, since it assumes that Christianity was no more than a medium for mystification, a means of justifying acceptance of exploitation. In fact, evidence from other areas of Mexico suggests that Christian beliefs and practices could be appropriated by the poor in their own defence. Such, for example, was the case in the various disturbances involving Maya peasants in the Altos de Chiapas in 1708-1713, especially the Tzeltal revolt of 1712. These disorders were associated with a wave of religious enthusiasm in which Indians were punished by the ecclesiastical and civil authorities for creating their own cults of the Virgin. From this there emerged a major regional rebellion, when a group of Indian town and village leaders from in and around the Tzeltal town of Cancuc decided in 1712 to reject Spanish ecclesiastical and political control completely, and to form their own priesthood and government. What had begun as a religious cult within the colonial order became a rebellion against the colonial regime. In this instance, then, we see Indians using Christianity as a means of regulating and controlling their own lives, even creating an alternative to the colonial order, however shortlived. The place of the cult of Guadalupe in Mexican popular consciousness during the Hidalgo rebellion has yet to be fully elaborated. It clearly represented a vital symbol of a Mexican culture in opposition to Spain, had deep roots in creole thought, and is perhaps best thought of as the tool of an incipient creole nationalism. None the less, the appropriation of the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe was also a compromise with popular consciousness, and its choice as a symbol of
revolt was evidently aimed at arousing a popular sense of shared community, religious justification and antagonism towards Spaniards.

If in popular insurrection we can detect bodies of ideas or popular discourses which, rooted in tradition and customary practice, could legitimate violent collective action in defence of community interests, this does not impute any direct political content to such behaviour. Indeed, the behaviour of plebeians and peasants who defend such a 'moral economy' is generally regarded as being 'pre-political', in the sense of being 'devoid of any explicit ideology, organisation and programme'. This might, however, be an excessively narrow definition of what constitutes the 'political', at least in the context of colonial Spanish America. For, given the central role which the state generally played in organising the extraction of a surplus from the peasantry, it was surely difficult for rural protests not to have a political dimension.

This was particularly true of those regions with substantial indigenous communities, such as the southern Andes, where government intruded directly into peasant life by taking tribute, conducting commerce, and levying forced labour, and where the power of landlords and merchants was determined not by the forces of a market economy, but by the extra-economic force of their standing in local society and in the colonial polity. However, it was also true in the very different societies of Quito and New Granada, where, through state monopoly controls on certain kinds of agricultural production and taxes on commerce and consumption, the state was the leading appropriator of income from urban consumers, artisans and independent peasants. Thus, when rebels struck out at landlords, merchants and Crown officials, they were not necessarily behaving in an apolitical or pre-political manner. Indeed, though it is invariably assumed that the political ideas found in the rebellions came from the elites which gave them leadership, it is perfectly conceivable that such ideas were clearly understood and shared also by lower-class rebels. Certainly there is no good reason to suppose that the elite 'constitutionalism' which I have described above should not have been fuelled as much by popular anti-Spanish feeling as by the elites' desire to protect their access to government. It may be argued that this was still not truly 'political', in that such anti-government and anti-Spanish feeling did not involve a project for taking power. This of course is true in the narrow sense that these movements did not envisage the complete overthrow of the colonial state. Even Túpac Amaru, it seems, envisaged an Inca king who would rule in partnership with the Spanish monarchy. Nevertheless, behind such feelings, there were ideas about preserving or gaining access to power for local men who were evidently felt to have more right to direct their communities. In short, because the colonial state assumed such a direct (and during the late colonial period increasingly prominent and interventionist) role in the economy and politics of the American dominions, popular protests had an unavoidably political colouring and, by being tinged with growing anti-peninsular feeling, might even be regarded as a rudimentary form of nationalism.

If popular insurrection is best explained by combining analysis of economic structures and conjunctures with attention to the presence of a 'popular
consciousness’, we must also take into account other non-economic factors that affected the location and timing of popular uprisings. In the southern Andes, for example, the burden of the reparto was widespread but not all native communities joined the Great Rebellion; indeed, even in the hinterland of Cuzco, where Túpac Amaru initiated the rebellion of 1780, the majority of Indians did not join the rebel forces. The drastic deterioration of economic conditions in north central and central Mexico during 1808–1810 also failed to produce a uniform response from the peasantry: while peasants in the central highlands and valleys were at least as poor, if not poorer, than those of the Bajío and were also afflicted by high food prices, they failed to join Hidalgo’s rebellion. What, then, determined the unequal distribution of rebellion?

One influence on the location and extent of rebellion is what Eric Wolf has called ‘the field of power’. In some areas, the repressive power of the state was greater than in others. Stern has argued that such power is precisely what inhibited the spread of the Great Rebellion into the centre/north highlands of Peru. Another factor is the presence of an organisational base: Scarlett O’Phelan has shown that Túpac Amaru’s strength lay in his ability to reach into Indian communities through his networks of relationships among kurakas. Similarly, the presence of intermediaries who serve as brokers between elites and populace was clearly important in creating cross-class alliances between patricians and plebeians in Quito in 1765, and in Socorro in 1781. In Mexico, popular insurgency was facilitated by the elements in the clergy and spread into areas where alliances could be formed with the leaders of informal networks of local power. It did not, however, find much scope for development in Mexican cities, largely because the poor had fewer opportunities to organise than did peasant villagers, enjoyed economic conditions and social services that tended to blunt the worst effects of deprivation, and were exposed to more intensive government propaganda and security measures.

A second general factor is the intensity with which grievances are felt and the manner in which their causes are perceived. I have already touched on the question of the intensity of grievances, in discussing the relative deprivation felt by communities subject to recent economic change; however, the importance of perception must also be underlined. Why did people in some areas rebel, while neighbouring areas remained quiescent? There are, of course, a number of answers to this question, depending on context. In Peru, for example, participation in the Great Rebellion of 1780–1782 seems to have been strongly influenced by the connections and rivalries of Indian leaders; in New Granada, it was affected by divisions between communities. To explain the failure of the Hidalgo rebellion to spread to the peasantry of central Mexico, Tutino argues that differences in peasant perception of the causes of their malaise is crucial to understanding the distribution of popular uprising during the Hidalgo rebellion. In his view, the dependent peasantry of the Bajío rebelled, not simply in a desperate reaction to famine but because the conditions of agrarian transformation in the region made them aware that the behaviour of landlords was the source of their trouble. In the central highlands of Mexico, by contrast, villagers retained sufficient lands to allow
them to produce a critical part of their own subsistence, in communities which were protected by the colonial state. They generally had to supplement this with earnings from seasonal work on nearby estates, but they were neither controlled directly by landlords nor dependent upon them for subsistence. The result, Tutino argues, was a relationship of ‘symbiotic exploitation’: landlords depended on the communities for labour, and members of the communities took wages from work on the estates. This relation was not immune to change during the later eighteenth century: demographic and economic growth provided the estates with cheaper labour and expanding markets for food crops, but the expansion of hacienda agriculture did not undermine the autonomous bases of peasant communities. In this setting, peasants were less likely to identify landlords as the cause of their problems; indeed, at a time of subsistence crisis, the great landlords might even appear as the benefactors of villagers, by offering wage labour and maize at a time when the villagers’ crops had failed.65

It seems, then, that explanation of popular militancy in the late colonial rebellions cannot be fitted into any general mould. Recourse to theories that relate the origins of popular mobilisation to changes in agrarian and commercial structures may help explain the context of rebellion, but clearly do not help to explain precisely why rebellion occurred when and where it did. Emphasis on short-term conjunctural economic crisis as the motor of lower-class revolt is also only a partial explanation. Our survey of popular rebellions suggests, instead, that fuller, more persuasive interpretations of the rebellions must take account of political and cultural factors, notably the local cultural milieu, the networks of informal local power and authority, and the presence and efficacy of repressive forces.

For theorists of social revolution, these rebellions may seem to have limited historical significance, since they failed to produce enduring transformations of social and political structures. It is certainly true that, while their outcomes varied, none succeeded in permanently altering the colonial state. The Quito and Comunero rebellions impeded but did not permanently derail Bourbon fiscal and administrative reform; the Great Rebellion in Peru and Upper Peru altered the configurations of political power only to the detriment of the indigenous communities and leaders involved in the uprising; as for Hidalgo, his rebellion failed to achieve the change of government it sought, and even the insurgency that followed was eventually defeated. Thus we might agree that the rebellions considered here are evidence that, on occasion, ‘revolutionary mountains strain to bring forth political mice’.66

Nevertheless, they still have much to interest the historian who is concerned to explain the development and the eventual collapse of the Spanish empire, and indeed to the historian who is interested in the wider phenomenon of rebellion and revolution in the late-eighteenth-century Atlantic world of Europe and its colonies.

Apart from their intrinsic interest as events which provide opportunities to take soundings into the society and cultures of Spanish America, the rebellions indicate that the Spanish world of the eighteenth century was a much less placid place than some leading historians of the ‘Age of Revolution’ have assumed. According to R. R. Palmer and Jacques Godechot, two prominent
proponents of the thesis that later eighteenth-century Europe and its colonies were swept by an 'Atlantic' or 'Democratic' revolution, the Spanish monarchy was remarkably free of the deep divisions and conflicts that fed discord in other European countries. However, neither Palmer nor Godéchot recognise the scale or consider the implications of the eighteenth-century rebellions in Spanish America; for them, rebellion came to Spanish America in the train of Napoleon's advance in Europe, and was fuelled by revolutionary French and North American ideas of popular sovereignty and individual rights. This is evidently a misconception. The rebellions of the later eighteenth century show us the Spanish world was not immune from the kinds of disturbances that affected the ancien régime elsewhere; those rebellions were, moreover, driven by forces that were not so different from those found in other regions of the Atlantic world.

How, then, do they fit into the grand narratives of eighteenth-century rebellion and revolution in the West? Let us first review the great Spanish American rebellions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for general patterns of cause, character and consequence. Clearly, each was a complex set of events, and the rebellions cannot be reduced to identical causes or characteristics. None the less, although each rebellion requires explanation in relation to its own context, we do not have to suppress their peculiarities to see some comparabilities and correspondences in their origins and development. First, they can all be related to a background of political change under Bourbon rule, which created temporary crises of authority propitious to the formation of multi-group, elite-led alliances. Secondly, they can be connected with the wider social and economic changes—associated with demographic growth and closer contact with the Atlantic economy—that altered traditional balances in society, and promoted or aggravated conflict between social groups within the colonies. Finally, there is a case for seeing the rebellions as expressions of underlying patterns of thought and feeling which reflect the emergence of strengthening senses of provincial identity among the Crown's American subjects, particularly the American Spaniards or creoles. During the seventeenth century, such provincial particularism had been a problem for Habsburg government in Europe, where the king's power was often restricted by constitutions, laws and customs (in Aragon, The Netherlands or Italy) which did not fetter its authority in Castile or the colonies, and where local patriotism was reinforced by linguistic and cultural difference. By the eighteenth century, this problem became increasingly apparent in Spanish America. For, although the Spanish American colonies lacked such separate institutional foundations and had much closer affinities of language and culture with Spain, creoles had none the less developed a sense of allegiance to a local patria; moreover, with the laxity of Habsburg government, especially in the latter half of the seventeenth century, came a sense that, as descendants of the conquerors and early settlers, they had some rights to self-government. This sense of a 'colonial pact' surfaced in all the rebellions, showing that, by the later eighteenth century, the colonies were capable of showing the same kind of provincial particularism found in the Spanish European world in the seventeenth century. Indeed, when combined with popular protests in city barrios
or, more commonly, village communities that had their own grievances and resentments, usually rooted in socio-economic conditions, this sense of identity and autonomy generated rebellions in Spanish America that were in some ways comparable to those of the mid-seventeenth-century Spanish Europe. Thus, one might even say that if the great rebellions of the mid-seventeenth century were a striking symptom of the decay of the Spanish Habsburg state, so the major insurrections of the late colonial period signalled the growing fragility of the Spanish Bourbon state.

How, finally, do the Spanish American rebellions compare with the rebellions of other areas of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world? To place the Spanish American rebellions in the larger context of the ‘Age of Revolution’ is a task beyond the bounds of a short paper such as this, but, by way of conclusion, some tentative observations can be made. As the previous comparison with the rebellions of the mid-seventeenth-century Spanish world suggests, we should probably look for parallels in the clashes of aristocracy and monarchy that took place in France, Sweden and the Habsburg empire during the 1760s and 1770s. These were rebellions which in some important respects resembled those of late colonial Spanish America: they were essentially defensive actions against the encroachment of centralising, tax-hungry monarchies; they tended to reflect the hierarchical character of the societies from which they emerged in their leadership and organisation; they looked to the past for their ideas and values; and, when they showed signs of radicalisation from below, their leaders swiftly returned to order.

The revolutionary movement that began in North America in the late 1770s, by contrast, offers more problematic parallels. The American Revolution began, like the rebellions of Quito, New Granada and Peru, in a reaction against fiscal reform imposed from the metropolis. Indeed, the Quito rebellion occurred in 1765, the same year that Britain’s colonial subjects embarked on the collective protest (against the Stamp Act) that was ultimately to lead them to rebel against their parent power; the Comunero and Túpac Amaru rebellions took place at the time when the American revolutionaries were still fighting for their independent republic against the British monarchy. In the event, however, the Spanish American rebels neither created independence movements, nor developed a vision of political and social reform of the kind developed in Britain’s 13 North American colonies. Their conservatism derived from their very different social and cultural milieux. While North American opposition to the policies of the British Crown developed in a social context where rapid demographic and economic growth had destabilised the patriarchal and paternalist structures of monarchical society, the norms of traditional society remained largely intact in Spain’s American dominions. Spanish Americans also lacked the strong institutional and ideological foundations for prolonged opposition to the monarchy that were found in Anglo-America. They had no republican traditions or religious heterodoxies to call upon, nor a ‘country’ ideology of opposition to absolutism and royal ‘tyranny’ of the kind which England’s radical Whigs gave to American colonials, nor the representative institutions and inter-colonial networks for political communication that enabled North Americans to imagine a community with national horizons; and, finally, the
Spanish Americans were geographically much more isolated from foreign aid of the kind that French naval and military intervention offered to the North American rebels during the American War of Independence. Perhaps most important was the fact that the underlying stability of a monarchical, caste society constrained political change in Spanish America until the metropolitan state itself collapsed under external pressure. It was only when, after the successive reverses in the long, almost continuous war with Britain (1796–1808) had undermined Spain’s economic system and corroded respect for the monarchy finally culminated in Napoleon’s usurpation of the Spanish monarchy that colonial rebellion could assume more radical aspirations. Indeed, after an initially loyalist response from the colonies in 1808, by 1810 Spain’s mounting crisis propelled leading creoles into adopting the political language and models offered by the United States of America and France. Now independence movements became possible, though the political culture and institutional framework of the Spanish world were to continue to exert a powerful influence over the American world long after the first breakdown of the monarchy in 1808–1814.

NOTES

1. For a brief comparison of rebellions in the Spanish world during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which also incorporates some of the arguments of this article, see Anthony McFarlane, ‘Challenges from the Periphery: Rebellion in Colonial Spanish America’, in Werner Thomas and Bart De Groof (eds), Rebelión y resistencia en el mundo hispanico de siglo XVII (1992) (Leuven), pp. 250–268.


3. Coatsworth provides a brief taxonomy of rural rebellion: see ibid., pp. 25–29.


5. Joseph Pérez, Los movimientos precursores de la emancipacion en Hispanoamérica (1979) (Madrid). Pérez also discusses and criticises another general interpretation, that of Francisco Morales Padron, which distinguishes between rebellions in the first half of the eighteenth century as spontaneous movements inspired by economic motives, and those of the second half of the century, which he describes as political and ideological, incorporating plans for independence.

6. Ibid., p. 44.

7. Ibid., pp. 128, 137.

8. For a comparison of the three eighteenth-century rebellions that compares some of their characteristics of composition and organisation, and argues that the Peruvian Great Rebellion was fundamentally different from those of Quito and the Comuneros, see Scarlett...


13. The role of creoles was particularly apparent in the Cochahamba rebellion of 1730, and in the abortive rebellion of Oruro in 1739, though as the priests who were often involved in local uprisings of Indians and mestizos may well have been creoles themselves, it may be that creole participation was even more frequent. See O'Phelan Godoy, Rebellions and Revolts in Eighteenth Century Peru and Bolivia (1985) (Koln), pp. 74-97.


18. Phelan, The People and the King, passim.


21. O'Phelan Godoy, Rebellions and Revolts, pp. 77-78.

22. Ibid., p. 87.


27. O'Phelan Godoy, Rebellions and Revolts, p. 226.


50. Ibid., pp. 1-33.

51. Ibid., p. 192.


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57. This idea is borrowed from Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983) (Delhi), p. 7.


63. On the composition of the Comunero movement and the factors affecting recruitment and behaviour, see Aguilera Peña, *Los Comuneros*, ch. 5.

64. Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution*, p. 125.

65. Ibid., pp. 138–182.


68. This article originates in a paper given at a University of Alcalá de Henares symposium on 'Poder y elites en América Latina', organised by Hermes Tovar Plazón at Sigüenza in 1987. I would like to thank Professor Tovar and other participants in that seminar for their comments when the paper was given.