

**Conflict and Balance in District Politics:
Tecali and the *Sierra Norte de Puebla*
in the Eighteenth Century**

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INTRODUCTION

In the last thirty years historical studies have gradually moved away from the black and white legends of Spanish motives as a major issue that defined Latin America between Conquest and Independence and a view of the state and church as monolithic and preeminent. Those earlier approaches to colonial Latin America implicitly took Spanish monopolists of land, merchant capital, and high office to be the only real actors in the colonial process. *Encomenderos*, landlords, and royal agents loomed too large in such studies to convey much about the range of activities and relationships in colonial life. We had from them only the vaguest ideas about what most Indian subjects thought and did except in their formal dealings with Europeans; and even then we knew mainly the story of what Europeans did to Indians. Recent scholarship has, in particular, revised the older notion of great estates dominating rural life from beginning to end and the dualism of inward and outward-oriented segments of colonial society and economy -with colonial towns, cities, mining areas and commercial farms as outward oriented, and the rest of the rural areas where most people lived as inward-oriented, filled with helpless victims of the market system and colonial government.

There has been a delay in communicating this new work to a wide audience for it is still common in the social science literature that draws on colonial history to find claims that great landlords were the only figures connecting inward-oriented, dependent peasant villages to the outside world as if the life of peasants were a simple dichotomy of a village and the 'outside world' with all important contacts between the two controlled by a local *hacendado*.¹ The delay is

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partly because the implications of these recent studies of colonial land tenure have not yet led to the next step in research: close regional studies of the specific and changing connections between rural villages and the state and other powerful outsiders to whom the villagers were subordinate. This chapter is a small entry into this subject of regional political history in the late colonial period. Political history here is less concerned with dynastic struggle and top-level events and policies than with the extension of a complex, sometimes contradictory, colonial bureaucracy into the Indian countryside and its interaction with local society and politics.

The point of entry is the intermediaries who connected Indian villages and individual peasants to the larger society and economy in several parts of the Intendancy of Puebla during the eighteenth century. I am particularly concerned with parish priests (*curas*) and royal magistrates at the district level, like the *corregidores*, *subdelegados*, and their lieutenants, the officials who were in face-to-face contact with Indian villagers. Evidence for the place of priests and magistrates in the affairs of villages and districts consists of three long investigations into village defiance of *corregidores* and *subdelegados* and other political disputes in which parish priests had a central part. The three investigations document district politics in four places and times: Santiago Tecali in 1734-1737, Zacatlán de las Manzanas in 1787, Tetela de Xonotla in 1793-1798, and San Juan Quimixtlán in 1799.²

As often happens, it is moments of crisis that leave a written residue of local behavior, relationships, and values. In tapping the record of these events, I am not mainly interested in the moments of crisis themselves. Rather, I have used them to reveal something of the nature of district-level politics and the activities of colonial officials in the local affairs of Indian communities. The first section presents the cases separately while the second section describes three broad patterns in the records and offers some observations about district-level politics that distinguish what was specific to the time and place of the investigations from what may have been common to districts with Indian peasant majorities in Mesoamerica.

TECALI AND THE SIERRA DE PUEBLA

The four places represented in these investigations share a similar landscape and colonial social formation. Zacatlán, Tetela de Xonotla, and Quimixtlán are located in the *Sierra de Puebla*, a rugged, partly forested area some fifty miles north of the city of Puebla and about 125 miles from Mexico City. There are great variations in climate within each district.³ Altitudes range from over 3,000 meters in the mountain valleys down to about 200 meters, producing hot, steamy weather in the low canyons and cold, dank conditions in the high country. But in nearly all places rainfall is abundant. Above temper-

ate Zacatlán at 2,000 meters, mist and rain are almost constant, and the temperate lands are good for raising maize and beans and fruit trees. The dense pre-Hispanic population there followed the usual pattern of decline from epidemic diseases in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but Indians still outnumbered non-Indians by about five to one in the 1740s. The Indians were village farmers, traders, and artisans scattered in dozens of communities in the temperate and high valleys. Most still spoke native languages and needed interpreters when they testified before colonial magistrates. The Spanish, *mestizo*, and *mulato* families clustered in the district seats, in the few modest *haciendas* and *ranchos* nearby, and in the silver mines of Xonotla district after the 1660s. Zacatlán and Tetela each were seats of *corregimientos* from the sixteenth century, and Quimixtlán was within the *corregimiento* of San Juan de los Llanos. All three were first evangelized by Franciscans, but parish duties were assumed by secular priests before the mid-seventeenth century.

Tecali is closer to the city of Puebla (to the southeast less than twenty miles) but similar to the *Sierra* districts in its social makeup. Situated mostly in fairly flat terrain at about 2,200 meters, Tecali's climate is temperate but cold in the winter and drier than the *Sierra de Puebla*. Seasonal rains are more erratic, and there is little surface water except for the Atoyac River at the bottom of a deep canyon. Aside from marble quarries, local production was mainly in maize farming, some ranching, aviculture, and local people were drawn more to the market of Tepeaca than to Puebla. Tecali was mainly an Indian district in the mid-eighteenth century, with sixteen *pueblos* and about 1,500 tributaries. Only forty non-Indian families were reported in this district in 1743, mainly in the town of Tecali and on the five *haciendas* and twenty *ranchos* of the district. Franciscans had been the local priests there for a century—from 1540-1641. At the end of the seventeenth century, Vetancurt spoke of the Indians of Tecali as exceptionally "*devoted to the Divine cult and to the service of the priests.*"⁴ Early in the eighteenth century three subject villages had become the seats of separate parishes with their own resident secular priests. The *corregimiento* was founded later in Tecali than in the *Sierra de Puebla*, in 1664. A private *encomienda* continued after 1696 and part of the tribute was still collected privately in 1803.

The Case of Santiago Tecali

In the mid-1730s resistance by three *sujetos* of Santiago Tecali to payment of tribute, *repartimiento de mercancía* debts, and land rents to the *cacique* of Tecali, and their opposition to the slaughter of their young cows by the *corregidor* led to a flurry of lawsuits against him and violent confrontations with the Indian officials of Tecali.⁵ These episodes of confrontations and costly litigation culminated in a long royal investigation to determine the cause, punish those responsible, and restore order. The testimony of witnesses and other evidence as-

sembled in this investigation uncovered a small host of rivalries and countervailing outside pressures on the Indian villages that complicated colonial government in this district.

At the center of this trouble was the subject village of Santa María Toxtepec. For years Toxtepec, an independent parish, had petitioned for political separation from Tecali. Finally, in 1734, a verdict came down from the *Audiencia* in Mexico City: Santa María Toxtepec would not be made the seat for another *corregimiento*. At about the same time, the priest of Toxtepec, Matías González de la Cruz, posted on the church door a royal *cédula* of 1723 prohibiting *repartimientos de mercancías*, a lucrative monopoly of the *corregidor* on the sale of bulls, mules, horses, seed, grains, brandy, wool, and *chile* in his district. Late in 1734, and again in 1735, the Indians of Toxtepec sought the priest's protection against the detailed list of abuses they claimed to suffer from the *corregidor*, Joseph Cárdenas, and Tecali's *cacique* and Indian *gobernador*, Cayetano de Tovar. Specifically, the Indians accused Cárdenas of overcharching tribute, forcing them to pay high prices for unwanted *repartimiento* goods (including starved and sick bulls), extracting one or two *pesos* a week from each family as payment for the *repartimientos*, and slaughtering Indian cows in large numbers without license as additional payment for *repartimiento* debts. The Indians also complained of forced contributions to the headtown of Tecali and to the *cacique*, from whom they rented their farmlands. Father González de la Cruz informed his bishop (because of the tithe on newborn calves the bishop had a direct interest in the slaughter of the Indians' cows), helped the village leaders draw up a formal complaint against the *corregidor*, and enlisted the services of an attorney in Mexico City (according to the *corregidor*, Toxtepec and its allied villages spent 20,000 *pesos* on these various lawsuits against Tecali!). Early in 1735, the people of Toxtepec refused to make any payments to the *corregidor* or the *cacique*, and ceased the customary services in Tecali. Sometimes two or three, sometimes as many as six of the other sixteen villages subject to Tecali joined Toxtepec in resisting payments and opposing the *corregidor* and *cacique*.

Since his main responsibilities and source of income were challenged by these acts, the *corregidor's* response was predictable and swift. With two to four hundred armed Indians from Tecali, he went out to force the disobedient villages into submission. The people of San Miguel resisted with rocks, sticks, and machetes, but were driven back by the *corregidor's* gunbearing guard. The troops from Tecali invaded the church and attacked those who had hidden there, killing four and wounding many others.⁶ The community chest was broken open and the money seized; and cattle were taken and buildings were set on fire. On the night of April 4, similar sacrileges were committed in Santa Isabel, San Lorenzo, and Santa María Toxtepec. Accompanied by the Lt. General of Tecali, the lieutenant entered the churches swearing to drink the priest's blood and kill the Indians of the parish, and proclaimed "Now you'll see, Father, whether there are men here."

Most of the Indians fled, but one was killed, others were wounded and, as in San Miguel, local men were arrested for failing to meet their tribute payments. Indians of Toxtepec ran to Puebla to tell the bishop, who ordered the excommunication of the *corregidor* and his lieutenants, and conducted a secret investigation of the events in August 1735.

Officials on all sides had gone too far for a local deal to be struck; ten of the district *pueblos* were in violation of the *corregidor's* orders; and the Spaniards in the district feared a general Indian revolt. At this point, the *Audiencia* stepped in with the support of the Viceroy-Archbishop of Mexico, arresting the *corregidor* and *cacique*, removing the priest of Toxtepec from his parish, and appointing an independent judge to investigate the whole affair. The Archbishop urged exemplary punishments for the leaders, whom he judged to be village *alcaldes*, *fiscales*, and scribes, and declared that, as instigators of rebellion, they had no right to the immunity of the church. Notaries and magistrates once again occupied center stage and even though there were further reprisals by Tecali Indians, resistance by some villages in late 1735 and 1736, and renewal of the old issues of taxes and the *repartimiento* by Cárdenas's successor and a new priest of Toxtepec, the way to a traditional solution that would diffuse anti-colonial feelings was clear. The priest was transferred and reprimanded for inciting the Indians to costly litigation and rebellion; the *corregidor* was found guilty of abuses in the *repartimiento* and involuntary labor but was exonerated from responsibility for the violence. Toxtepec and other *pueblos* received no relief beyond the *repartimiento* payments, since their political ambitions were judged to have caused the confrontation.

Incidentally, and despite the apparent suborning of some witnesses, the detailed inquiry into the troubles in Tecali sheds light on the sources of tension between rural villages and district officials there and the important but largely undefined role of the parish priest in district politics in the eighteenth century. There may have been an ethnic side to the conflict (the Chocho-speaking villages of the district were all in the parish of Toxtepec), but politically-dependent communities such as Toxtepec, now with nearly the population of the *cabecera* and already semi-independent in ecclesiastical matters, were restive over the costs, inconvenience, and humiliation of subservience to another town. The Spaniards' equation of the municipal '*república*' with civilization, their willingness to receive petitions for new *cabecezas*, and their preference for a divide-and-rule colonial system gave hope to ambitious communities.⁷

The people of Toxtepec expressed their ambitions and frustrations when they decried various forced contributions to the officials of Tecali, including labor service at *fiesta* time and a 20½ *reales* annual payment per tributary. This contribution was unusually high, but Indian witnesses from the *cabecera* and other *sujetos* agreed that it was a very old tax that had been paid without objection until recently.

Even during this period of protest, most villages in the Tecali district raised no objection to the contribution. The refusal of Toxtepec and its parish villages to hold their community elections in Tecali, as was the custom, was another sign of hard feelings about political subordination. The old rites of service would no longer be completed without question. After 1734, Toxtepec balked at sending two live deer to Tecali for the *fiesta de Santiago* at which Tecali Indians dressed as Chichimecs and chased the deer. Toxtepec also refused to supply the usual food, towels and money for Easter week celebrations in the *cabecera*. The priest of Toxtepec had his own reasons for supporting the Indians in their petition for *cabecera* status. Like many rural priests, he was irritated by the self-serving demands of a remote *corregidor* and his officious lieutenants. But as a priest with his own parish set within a larger *corregimiento* to which his parishioners owed much of their time and money, he had another reason to favor political separation, especially since his annual stipend (which was only one-third that of the priest of Tecali) was paid to him by the *cacique* of Tecali out of the 20½ *reales* contribution of his Indian tributaries.

Cacique Tovar's authority was quite unusual. He owned the farmlands worked by Toxtepec and other *sujetos*; he collected the customary contributions from all tributaries in the district that paid for the priests' stipends, Tecali's lawsuits, the publication of Papal Bulls, the *fiestas* of Tecali, and the annual office-taking ceremony in Tecali for village officials throughout the district. He collected the tribute and other village fees (such as payment for his permission to cultivate *magueyes* or hold dances); and villages in the *corregimiento* were expected to bring him chickens and flowers at Easter (just as they did for the priest) and to provide him with household servants. These responsibilities and privileges, derived from his inherited position, were enhanced by personal skills, longevity, and close association with the *corregidor*. Literate in Spanish and Nahuatl, he was assigned responsibility for keeping the records of public collections and expenditures. At the time of the unrest in 1734, he had been reelected *gobernador* of Tecali nine consecutive times with the *corregidor's* support, in violation of royal orders against consecutive reelection. To the Indian *sujetos* he was closely associated with the *corregidor* since he provided hundreds of armed Indians from the *cabecera* for the magistrate's sallies into the countryside, and collaborated in the slaughter of the villagers' cows.

The priest of Toxtepec and the *corregidor* of Tecali held conflicting views of the priest's political duties and the *repartimiento de mercancías*. Father González de la Cruz saw himself in the heroic role of the protector and father of the Indians in temporal as well as spiritual matters, a role dating from the 'Spiritual Conquest' of the sixteenth century. The villagers in his district looked to him for this kind of guidance and, as witnesses, spoke of him as their father and the only outsider who could be trusted to help them. Before the violence of 1734, villages within the parish of Toxtepec had written to him

pleading for his protection against the burdens of the *repartimiento*; and to this priest, the *corregidor's repartimiento* was "*the unhealthy cancer.*" He could see that the *corregidor's* demands for payment of one *peso* a week from every Indian family against the *repartimiento* advances forced them to beggar themselves at the magistrate's bidding. To keep up with the payments, the Indians often sold cheap cattle they were forced to buy from the *corregidor* at inflated prices. By 1734, González de la Cruz was ready to act on appeals like this one from the Indians of Santa Clara:

"We work all year yet we can hardly clothe ourselves; often if we eat dinner, there is no supper and we are even robbed of sleep worrying about how we can find so much money (...). Together, all of our children in this pueblo plead with you, kneeling at your feet, to look upon us with eyes of mercy; we fervently hope that our cura and pastor will defend us from such cruelty and hardship."

Father González de la Cruz was correct in posting the royal law of 1723 against the *repartimientos* -the law specified that the parish priests were to tell their Indians of its provisions every six months-but, in the view of the *corregidor* and later of the *fiscal* of the *Audiencia*, the priest had exceeded his authority by taking up the Indians' cause against the *corregidor* and aiding them in their lawsuits. Since Toxtepec had no interpreter other than Father González, the priest as defender of the Indians felt that he could not stop at simply posting the law.

Corregidor Cárdenas naturally saw the issue in a different light. The *repartimiento* was his main source of income. The priests' temporal role should be limited to helping the Indians understand their place in colonial society and teaching them to obey; or, as he put it, "*good education, submission, and instruction of the Indians.*" Cárdenas complained of the priest making the Indians of Toxtepec completely dependent on him, and of the Indians showing favoritism to Father González. González seems to have been the effective judge in his parish, operating a jail and inflicting whippings and time in the stocks at his own discretion. All of these activities were detrimental to royal justice and the King's jurisdiction, said Cárdenas, who saw them as the source of Indian disrespect to him during the previous two years. Higher colonial authorities later agreed, condemning González's "*influence and passion*" in the temporal affairs of the Tecali district.

Although there are only hints of connections in these records, this conflict between priest and *corregidor* was more than strictly local. Non-Indians in the regional center of Tepeaca were involved on both sides. Several merchants of Tepeaca who financed the *repartimiento* as *aviadores* were involved on the *corregidor's* side while rival merchants, two captains, and the priests of Tepeaca and Cholula who were personal friends of González encouraged the petitions and complaints against Cárdenas.

The Case of Zacatlán de las Manzanas

The *repartimiento de mercancías* of the *corregidor* also was related to another *tumulto* and long investigation for Zacatlán de las Manzanas in the *Sierra de Puebla* in 1787. In this case, the *repartimiento* was one of a series of district-level problems brought on by the serious food shortages and epidemic of 1785-1786, problems that might be smoothed over in times of plenty.⁸ Trouble began in August 1785 when frosts destroyed much of the maize crop in the district. Grain was especially expensive and in short supply in the *cabecera* of Zacatlán with its 14,000 residents, and in Chinauapan. To insure against shortage the following year, the *corregidor*, Captain Manuel Esteban Sánchez Tagle, ordered that an extra crop be planted in early 1786 on untilled lands of *ranchos* and Indian villages, and that the lands be worked with communal labor. The Bishop of Puebla donated 90 percent of the money needed to provide five hundred *fanegas* of seed maize,⁹ and Sánchez Tagle depended upon the resident priests in the eleven parishes of the district to oversee the planting, prevent black marketeering, and deliver the crop to Zacatlán. Meanwhile, villages were ordered to sell some of the maize they had saved from 1785; but according to the *corregidor*, the priests and villages held back nearly all of the maize that was stored in the *cofradía* granaries. Late in June the special crop of nearly 50,000 *fanegas* was harvested in the mountain villages and some 1,500 Indians were transporting their maize to the *alhóndigas* (public granaries) of Zacatlán and Chinauapan for sale at a fixed price of 4½ *pesos* per *fanega*. Compliance was compelled under threat of arrest or physical punishment by the lieutenants who patrolled the districts with squads of twenty-five armed militiamen. Sánchez Tagle claimed that he had ordered this military supervision because the Indians would not sell enough of their grain to the needy towns unless coerced. Maize was to be distributed to all at a fixed price from the Zacatlán *alhóndiga* under Sánchez Tagle's control. The Indians wrote to their priests objecting to this forced sale of their entire crop to Zacatlán. The priests informed Sánchez Tagle, but these rumblings of what was to come went unheeded.

On July 5 at 9:00 a.m., a crowd of Indians, mainly women from other villages, went on the rampage in Zacatlán -releasing prisoners from jail, breaking the grain measures at the *alhóndiga*, harvesting the community maize plot of the *cabecera*, breaking open the granary and selling the maize there as they pleased. Sánchez Tagle hid for four hours in a wardrobe in the priest's residence and, on July 9, fled the district. Indian control over the maize market and granary lasted until the evening of July 6 when the women obeyed the soothing words of the local *vicario*. From Puebla, Sánchez Tagle wrote to the Viceroy that, for fear of another *tumulto*, he would not return to Zacatlán without an escort of twenty-five militiamen. He claimed that the mountain Indians had risen up because they had planted too much maize in the special harvest and now were angry because Zacatlán no

longer would buy it at a high price. The investigation, however, revealed that the Indians who had come to Zacatlán that morning were angry about being forced to sell their entire crop to Sánchez Tagle without being able to buy back enough for their own needs. Sánchez Tagle admitted under oath that just before the violent protest, little grain was available for sale to the Indians and the price had risen to 10-12 *pesos*; this in spite of the fact that the granary was full and the price paid to the Indians for their maize had been 3½-5 *pesos*. Sánchez Tagle denied the rumor that he was removing maize from the granary and selling it at night at 12 *pesos* a *fanega*. His reply then went on to claim that the high prices were the result of priests in remote parishes hoarding the grain to continue the shortages and then selling at high prices outside the *alhóndiga*. He claimed that he was only trying to protect the *cabecera*, to insure an adequate supply of maize throughout the district, and to provide a surplus for shipment to needy districts elsewhere in central Mexico. The Viceroy concluded that the Indian women revolted because the *alhóndiga* would only sell them one-third of the maize they needed and at an inflated price.

In spite of the serious allegations by the priests and the *corregidor*, Sánchez Tagle remained in office after 1786, as did the priests in the eleven *doctrinas*. An uneasy peace had been restored without resorting to Sánchez Tagle's recommendation that the troops be sent in, that two or three leaders of the violence be sentenced to service in the fortifications of San Juan de Ulúa, and that another ten or twelve be whipped for good measure. The investigation into the *tumulto* and the charges against Sánchez Tagle exposed a structure of tension between parish priests in outlying areas and the *corregidor*. As early as March 1785, Sánchez Tagle had been warned by the *fiscal* of the *Audiencia* to preserve harmony in his relationship with the *curas*. Both the priests and the *corregidor* had attempted to influence the elections of officials in the remote Indian villages.¹⁰

As in the Tecali case, Indian villagers looked to their parish priests for help in resisting what they thought were illegal innovations and abuses by the *corregidor* and his lieutenants, and in launching formal written complaints against them. The *corregidor* seemed to be unconcerned about the Indians' suffering from the famine and epidemic and showed little interest in their plea for temporary relief from the tribute tax. The pressing issue was Sánchez Tagle's interference with the usual way of selling maize: for the special crop of 1786 the Indians had to sell the entire harvest to the *alhóndiga*; they could not keep what they wanted to sell where and when they chose, as they were accustomed to do. This crisis and the investigation that followed a formal complaint brought other abuses to light. The forced sale of expensive mules by the *corregidor* to the villagers appeared prominently in the testimony of Indians witnesses, although without the detailed complaints of the Tecali Indians about inferior cattle or the various other monopoly goods distributed by the *corregidor* of Tecali. The rural priests seem to have primed the Indians for the issue, pub-

licizing the royal law against *repartimientos* issued in 1784 and urging villagers not to accept the mules delivered by the *corregidor*. In one case, the lieutenant of Tecoyuca reported hearing the priests instruct his Indians to pay their legal debts on time, to pay what they owed to the *cofradías*, to pay their clerical fees, and to support their families, but under no circumstances to accept the *repartimiento* mules because the *corregidor* was an outrageous usurer. Sánchez Tagle retaliated by telling the Indians they did not have to obey the priests in any but spiritual matters. In Tlapacoya, the *corregidor* threatened fifty lashes and imprisonment in Mexico City to Indians who joined the local priest in his lawsuit against the *repartimiento de mulas y toros*. As a result, said the priest, only about one-third of his parishioners would attend Mass any longer or confess during Holy Week. Sánchez Tagle claimed that he received no salary and none of the usual fees for his judicial services from village subjects. The *repartimiento*, he said, was his only source of income and he was loath to give it up. And, he added, the profits from the *repartimiento* were not nearly as great as his opponents claimed (it was rumored that the *repartimiento* yielded a 50 percent profit). By his account, sales of *repartimiento* livestock produced 30,000 *pesos* a year but his expenses were 25,940 *pesos* plus 900 *pesos alcabala* tax on the sale, leaving a net profit of 3,160 *pesos*, or just over 10 percent. Besides, argued Sánchez Tagle, he was providing an important service in making these animals from distant places available to his district.

The *repartimiento de mercancías* was unusually important in this district because it was connected to the lucrative market in chicken eggs. Mules and horses were advanced to Indians who in turn, were obliged to pay off their debts in eggs which the *corregidor* shipped to Mexico City. If Indian producers did not accept the *repartimiento* animals, they were sometimes forced to sell their eggs to the *corregidor* on credit. Sánchez Tagle was careful not to divulge his profits from the egg sales. He justified this sweet purchase arrangement on the grounds that he was, again, performing a vital service to the capital; that the practice was as old as the *corregimiento* of Zacatlán; and that priests and other non-Indians were busy wholesaling eggs, too, through old women they commissioned to buy for them. The *corregidor's* lieutenants were also accused of forcing Indians to sell them their eggs and exacting the sale of other local products, including nuts, at low prices. These forced sales were especially irritating to the Indians of this district because they had long been traders of eggs, nuts, *chile totonaco*, maize, fruits, and lard to distant markets.

The *corregidor*, in turn, supplied witnesses to support his charges that at least three of the eleven parish priests in his district were hoarding grain for profit, telling their Indian parishioners not to pay the *repartimientos* or obey the lieutenants, making insulting remarks in public about the *corregidor*, and being the evil geniuses behind the Indians' formal complaints, lawsuits, and disobedience to him. The administrators of the *alcabala* and tobacco monopoly had joined the

priests against him, he said, because of his vigorous campaign against Indian drunkenness. Sánchez Tagle's major complaint against the priests, dating back to 1784 and 1785, centered on their interference in village politics, and it is in the investigation of these charges that the record provides information about the influence of priests and district officials in local elections.

The records of three village elections that went wrong in 1786 were included by Sánchez Tagle in his defense of 1787. In the case of San Baltasar in the *doctrina* of Tepezintla, a group of Indian men wrote to the *corregidor* in February and March asking that the *gobernador*, Francisco Antonio, be removed because he had been re-elected in consecutive years, was not a native of their town, and was cruel, drunk, and despotic. The Indian petitioners wanted new elections to be held in Zacatlán, rather than in Tepezintla where the *cura* resided, because of what they claimed was the priest's interference in previous elections. It was customary in this *pueblo* for the priest to propose three candidates for election to *gobernador*. But now the previous *gobernador* had simply been 'elected' by the *cura* without a vote, and the Indian petitioners wanted a younger man in office. To investigate this dispute, Sánchez Tagle sent the Indian *gobernador* of Zacatlán, who heard witnesses on both sides disagree about the charges against Francisco Antonio. The *corregidor's* representative ordered new elections that the parish priest, Joseph Mariano de Ortega, refused to attend. Three candidates were named, and the elections produced a new *gobernador*, Antonio Bernabé. Technically, the results were invalid since Father Ortega declined to certify them. Sánchez Tagle's intervention in San Baltasar may have been prompted by Father Ortega's suit against the *corregidor* in 1785 for his egg monopoly and his management of the maize shortage. The disputed elections for Huitlapan and Ahuacatlán in December 1786 echo the San Baltasar case. Ordinarily the *cura* proposed three candidates for election. The elections were held in the parish seat, although, for the most distant villages, elections could be held on the day of the annual *fiesta* of the patron saint when a priest went there to celebrate mass. However, in Huitlapan in 1784, 1785 and 1786, the priest nominated only the illiterate old *gobernador*, declared him elected, and insisted that elections be held in his *casas curales* rather than the *casas reales*. New elections were ordered for 1787 by Sánchez Tagle and supervised by his lieutenant. Predictably, the *cura* refused to certify them. The elections in Ahuacatlán and its *sujetos* also had the *cura* insisting on the *casas curales* for the vote and failing to attend or certify the elections convened by the *corregidor's* lieutenants in the *casas reales*.

The irregular election of the *gobernador* in the *cabecera* of Zacatlán in November 1786 did not involve the priest. There it was the *corregidor* who had the privilege of nominating the three candidates for election. Sánchez Tagle proposed three elders who had served for many years in various offices including *gobernador*, but the Indian voters wanted a fourth man, Anastasio de la Cruz, whom Sánchez

Tagle considered a *mulato* and a leader of the July *tumulto*. Fearing another violent incident, he allowed the election to go forward, witnessed by the lieutenant and the priest. Sánchez Tagle then raised his objection with the *Audiencia* but an investigation showed that de la Cruz was registered as an Indian, not a *mulato*, and there was no firm evidence that he had taken part in the *tumulto*. The election was allowed to stand.

The Cases of San Juan Quimixtlán and Tetela de Xonotla

The 1790s produced a series of violent episodes and disputes between village priests and district officials in the Puebla area. Two of these for the *Sierra* region are described in a lengthy royal investigation and defense of the priests by the Bishop of Puebla in 1799.¹¹ The priest of San Juan Quimixtlán, Manuel de Arenas, and the *subdelegado's* lieutenant for this town, Rafael Ramos, were at odds in 1798 over the adultery of Ramos's daughter with his married assistant. In pursuing this matter and the lieutenant's habits of gambling in the *casas reales*, allowing his wife to appear drunk in public, selling *aguardiente* on Easter Sunday, and allowing the Indians to drink a forbidden *tepache*, Father Arenas stated that he was merely fulfilling his priestly duty to oversee the public morals. On January 5, 1799, the dispute became a public scandal as the two officials argued in the town plaza. According to the Bishop's account, Lieutenant Ramos insulted Father Arenas -Ramos reportedly told him "*que se fuera a la mierda*" ["(...) to go to hell"]- and shouted to the Indians not to obey the priest, but to tie him up as mentally deranged, and to carry on sexually as they wished with the certainty that their lieutenant would protect them. Father Arenas ordered that the church bells be rung -calling the Indians to assembly- and went into a rage, biting the earth, fulminating against the townspeople for disobedience, declaring the lieutenant excommunicated, and threatening to whip him until two local Spanish men and the lieutenant's wife pleaded on their knees for the priest to relent. Arenas then ordered the Indians to arrest Ramos, threatening them with excommunication if they refused, and to take him to the town jail where he was held for three days.

Under oath, the Indian *gobernador* of Quimixtlán later told his version of the encounter between Ramos and Arenas. Although he did not speak much Spanish, the *gobernador* could see that it was a heated argument. The lieutenant ordered him to arrest Arenas but the Indians refused because he was their priest. The *gobernador* got down on his knees and pleaded with the *cura* to stop shouting, but Arenas only became more enraged, threatening to bring down the heavens, dry up the rivers, make the earth tremble, and refuse his Indians the last rites unless they arrested the lieutenant. The *gobernador* denied personally arresting the lieutenant but all of the other witnesses testified that several unnamed local Indians obeyed the priest's command. In his defense, Father Arenas said that he ordered the arrest

only because of the public insults, the end product of the lieutenant's flouting of the priest's position of respect and arbiter of the public morals. After this incident, Arenas continued to make intemperate accusations that Ramos was a depraved enemy of religion and was fully supported in his imperious, immoral conduct by his superior, the *subdelegado* of San Juan de los Llanos. The Bishop of Puebla rose to the *cura's* defense, warning of the result for other Indian communities of this lieutenant's example of low morals and highhandedness. But the *fiscal* of the *Audiencia* was more impressed by the priest's excessive rage - "like that of a rabid dog" - and his temerity to arrest an agent of the King. The *fiscal* censured the priest and warned darkly of the death penalty as the prescribed punishment for treason.

Reading between the lines, the root of the problem between Arenas and Ramos was not the insults or the specific case of adultery but, rather, a serious jurisdictional dispute and the priest's fear that his position in the community had been undermined. The lieutenant had not permitted the priest to whip the adulterers in question and he had released from jail other men and women the priest had placed there for adultery. The lieutenant's action was less a stand on public morality than a declaration that he alone had the authority to make such arrests and mete out the punishment. As the lieutenant had said to Arenas, "You are not my judge." In an earlier provocation, the lieutenant had boasted that the *cura* had jurisdiction only in his church, to which Arenas tried to reply with his fists.

In the second case, from Tetela de Xonotla in 1793-1795, another *cura* was temporarily suspended from his duties on suspicion of inspiring a village uprising. The real culprit turned out to be the overbearing *subdelegado*, Antonio O'Farrill. Chased out of Xonotla by the local Indians in June 1793, O'Farrill lodged a formal complaint against the parish priest, José Antonio Martínez de Segura, as the force (or 'motor' as the petition reads) behind this movement against the King's judge. O'Farrill returned and Father Martínez de Segura remained, but the investigation into the charges dragged on for six years. The results of the investigation were clear and a little surprising. All of the witnesses, including O'Farrill's successor as *subdelegado* of Teziutlán, as well as Indians from Xonotla, cleared Martínez de Segura of any responsibility for the *tumulto* of 1793. They had only the highest praise for the priest's unselfish service and personal sacrifices in the parish over more than twenty years. He had distributed maize in times of famine, had bought land for the landless, protected Indians from excessive tribute, performed burials without charge, pardoned all clerical fees during the recent epidemic, and treated the non-Indians just as well. In short, he was judged "an example of love and humility," venerated and respected by the citizens of the district. Rather than inciting the violent protest against O'Farrill, he had stepped in to restore calm. O'Farrill had provoked the protest himself by ordering fifty lashes for eight local Indian

nobles when he was not met on the outskirts of Xonotla by a grand welcoming party. Halfway through the public whippings, the assembled crowd of Indians in the plaza took up rocks and drove O'Farrill out of town.

The inquiry into the *subdelegado's* conduct in office revealed that he demanded far more than the usual Indian service and contributions. He had forced Indians in the district to provide him with fish, bread, *aguardiente*, and other scarce supplies. For two years he had resided in Puebla rather than Xonotla and had demanded household servants from his district. These Indian laborers were neither paid nor fed by O'Farrill and were reported to have sold their clothes while in the city just to buy *tortillas*. During his residence in Xonotla he sent Indians back to Puebla on errands every few days, again without pay. He demanded cash contributions from the Indians to finance his lawsuits against Father Martínez de Segura. Finally, at the end of 1798 the *subdelegado* went too far. In the December elections for the 1799 Indian *cabildo* of Xonotla, O'Farrill refused to certify the results and ordered a new election with his favorites, the Básquezes, as the candidates. Only the Básquez relatives voted; the rest of the Indians formed a menacing crowd at the *casas reales* and O'Farrill once again fled for his life. At the time, Father Martínez de Segura had been away from Xonotla for five months, so it was clear that the priest was not responsible. When Martínez de Segura returned -as reported by O'Farrill's grateful successor, José Rubén de Celis- he preached brotherly love, forgiveness, and respect for royal authority.¹²

THREE PATTERNS AND SOME OBSERVATIONS

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A striking, but not surprising, political pattern in these eighteenth-century investigations is that the parish priest in remote places enjoyed greater loyalty and affection of rural villagers than did the *subdelegados* and lieutenants. Indians in these cases turned to the priest for protection against arbitrary acts of the district officials, and against the depredations of the *repartimiento* system. Forced to choose between obeying the priest, the lieutenant, or the *corregidor*, Indian peasants usually followed the priest, even if they questioned his motives and feared the consequences, as in the arrest of the lieutenant of Quimixtlán. Respect for the position of the priest did not mean that *curas* were not in conflict with their *pueblos* -the example of local factions complaining of the priest's interference in their village elections is documented here- but it does suggest that the rural priest cannot be understood only as a solitary figure in the countryside, an inconsequential religious specialist and civil servant whose position "as a representative of the government gained him little respect from the exploited Indians."¹³

Naturally, the power of the rural priest in his remote parish varied from village to village and from one district to the next. The opportunity for special influence, however, was built into the circumstances of the country *cura*. Indian villages of Puebla were reputed to be exceptionally devout and inclined to follow their *cura* if he established himself among them. The rural priest usually was the only state agent who lived and travelled regularly among peripheral Indian *pueblos*. The *corregidor* and lieutenants, by contrast, usually lived in their *cabeceras* and spent as little time as possible in the remote parts of their district in the eighteenth century. Because the bulk of their actions would have been hidden from secular superiors, the *cura* enjoyed a partial independence as territorial agents. Often he was one of the few literate residents who understood colonial law. His position as intermediary between Indian laymen and God, and between laymen and the saints, and his primary role in the rituals of commemoration, morality, rites of passage, redemption and fertility, and the threat of excommunication helped to plant his spiritual authority deep into the daily lives of the faithful, even if they had their own syncretic beliefs, too.

Whether a particular parish priest exerted much influence on villagers in his area depended quite a lot on his personal qualities. The saintly Martínez de Segura who spent over twenty years as the *cura* of Xonotla had an extraordinarily loyal following. The hot-headed Arenas of Quimixtlán, with less than five years in the parish, got his way with the Indians in that moment of truth but it was clear that he was more feared than loved or trusted and probably had used up whatever goodwill his office carried with the local Indians. Matías de la Cruz of Toxtepec actively defended his parish's interests against the *corregidor*, but his fatherly motives were mixed with obvious political interests in wanting to separate himself and his parishioners from dependence on the *cacique* and *cabecera* of Tecali. It is not clear whether he commanded much personal support from the Indians of his district.

Generalizations about parish priests' attitude toward their work and its reflection in their behavior clearly will not hold for all *cura* or necessarily for any one of them. Still, it seems generally true that the idealistic sense of mission of the friars in the 'Spiritual Conquest' of the sixteenth century was less often found in the eighteenth-century clergy. Late colonial *curas* were more likely to lodge complaints against their Indian parishioners than before, and to be occupied with family affairs and their private property. Failure to instill the subtleties and richness of Spanish Catholicism in Indians after the first great conversions later bred disillusionment among clergymen about the capacity and intentions of Indians and an estrangement inspired by the cultural distance between inward-looking Indian villagers and city-trained priests. "*Limited capacity or intellectual stupidity*" was the usual way for Spaniards of the late colonial period to characterize Mexican Indians,¹⁴ their willful idolatry made the priest's duty to

educate them an "invisible war." Many more young men took the cassock in the eighteenth century, to the point that there was an oversupply of ordained clergymen and much competition and influence-peddling for chaplaincies and the better parish assignments.¹⁵ Nearly all Mexican priests were trained in the nearest cathedral city, such as Puebla, or in Mexico City. They were educated as part of an urban, intellectual elite and most never left off wishing to return to the civilized city and its comforts, and the conversation and company of their equals. There was great diversity in a *cura's* length of service in one parish, but the tendency -especially among younger priests in the late colonial period- was to move from place to place every few years, to spend as much time as possible in the cathedral city competing in the periodic *oposiciones* for tenured posts and maintaining contacts, hoping against hope to secure one of the prized salaried positions in the Cathedral Chapter.

One parish priest of the mundane sort in late eighteenth-century Puebla, José Miguel Guridi y Alcocer, left a wonderfully candid and detailed autobiography in which he examined his early career and his feelings about parish service.¹⁶ Born a creole Spaniard of humble origins near Texmelucan in 1763, Guridi showed little interest in learning or religion before he was sent to the seminary in Puebla at the age of eleven. He earned the baccalaureate degree in theology at nineteen but was not yet committed to the religious life. He says that he spent much of his time during those early years writing poetry, reading fairly widely in history, philosophy, and literature, falling in love with a cousin in Mexico City, and striving to curb his temper, vanity, and penchant for argument. The poor results of his subsequent legal studies in Mexico City and the marriage of his cousin to another suitor kindled his plans for the priesthood. He became the star pupil in his seminary class, moving quickly through his studies, receiving a chaplaincy and scholarship in theology, serving as an instructor in philosophy and the scriptures and becoming a Professor (*catedrático*) of Sacred Scriptures in Mexico City. Following his ordination in Puebla in 1791, he held a professorship in the seminary there and was assigned a small parish in the city.

Late in 1791, instead of being named rector of the seminary as he hoped, Guridi was awarded the tenured post of parish priest (*propietario*) of Acaxete, an Indian parish less than a day's walk from Puebla. As Guridi realized, it was unusual for such a young, inexperienced priest to receive a permanent post like this with a guaranteed, if modest, income. But he was restless and dissatisfied. Few of his parishioners spoke Spanish, and as a "sociable man," Guridi saw the post as a kind of purgatory, "a wasteland, a solitude, (...) a sandy desert, (...) a páramo."¹⁷ Father Guridi left the parish whenever he could, politicking in Puebla for a prebend's post, earning a doctorate in canon law in Mexico, practicing in Mexico City, and holding the part-time legal position of *promotor fiscal* in Puebla. He continued to keep his parish post but was rarely there during his eleven years' tenure.

Finally, the bishop ordered him to return or renounce his rights to the parish, and ordered him not to leave Acaxete without his express license. Having "*left my heart in Mexico City*," Guridi reconciled himself to life in Acaxete, but just briefly. The autobiography ends in 1802 with the thirty-nine year old Guridi headed back to Mexico City as the *cura* of the *villa de Tacubaya*, "*handing myself over to Providence*."¹⁸ In fact, this was just the beginning of Father Guridi's public career, for he served as a deputy of the Cortes of Cádiz in 1811, became a canon of the Cathedral in Mexico City in 1821, and signed the first federal constitution of Mexico in 1824. He died on October 4, 1828. Probably few parish priests of Puebla were as ambitious or as successful as Guridi, but many of them must have shared his hopes, his private feelings, and his restlessness. If so, this concern for career and the amenities of city life, and the long absences from the parish would have separated them in an important way from the needs and trust of their Indian parishioners (although their stronger contacts with public figures in the cities might also have made them even more effective as brokers).

Whatever his personal qualities, the *cura* had traditional responsibilities that brought him into the public affairs of his parish. He was the *padre manso*, the strong but gentle father, the teacher. Summoning his view of the ideal parish priest. Archbishop Lorenzana, in a pastoral letter of October 5, 1766, spoke of "*the good and zealous cura contributing in large part or in toto to the spiritual and political government of a pueblo (...); the prudence of the párroco as Father moderates and orders the actions of his children*."¹⁹ He was charged with informing superior colonial officials of local behavior that violated royal law. The right to judge and punish crimes against canon law was within his authority from early colonial times. His role as judge and protector of the Indians extended into what today would be considered civil and political matters; supervising and verifying local elections, protecting Indians against extortion by merchants and against abuses by the *corregidor*. And he had special responsibility to prevent excessive drunkenness and protect the integrity of the family.²⁰ Eighteenth-century bishops and archbishops were not reluctant to speak out on the civic responsibilities of the King's Indian subjects. Lorenzana, for example, published a special letter to the Indians on June 30, 1768 in which he spoke of their specific obligations to insure the good order of their *pueblos*, including a job for every man over twenty-five years old, and the duty to marry and build a home.²¹

The customary public and political responsibilities of the priests inevitably overlapped with those of the *corregidores*, *subdelegados*, and lieutenants. This was true in the general sense of looking out for the good conduct and protection of Indian subjects and in some very spe-

cific matters, such as drunkenness and overseeing elections, where the priests and district magistrates were to share these responsibilities. But in the last decades of the colonial period, royal orders cut away much of this overlapping authority, doing so at the expense of the *cura*. Public drunkenness became a problem to be dealt with by the *subdelegados* and lieutenants. Priests were forbidden to use the whip -as they had done for more than two centuries- as punishment for Indian drunkenness and moral transgressions. Priests as teachers of literacy in Indian districts were being replaced by *maestros de escuela* (primary-level school teachers) who were salaried from the village treasury and generally allied with the *subdelegado*. The campaign to promote spoken and written Spanish throughout the viceroyalty was accompanied by orders for priests to preach and communicate with their Indian subjects in Spanish, and elimination of the requirement that *curas* speak the Indian language of their district. Where enforced, these changes would have reduced the *cura's* strategic role as interpreter and cultural broker.

Finally, in the *Ordenanza General de Intendentes* of 1786, only Spanish judges could convoke, preside over, and certify local elections.²² *Curas* were still to communicate royal decrees to their parishioners and to report to the colonial government on local affairs,²³ but they were losing many of their formal responsibilities under the law. Mexico's Archbishop in 1803, Francisco Xavier de Lizana y Beaumont published a letter to his priests on September 1, 1803 tacitly supporting these changes. In ordering that the priests obey their royal superiors he remarked that "*the ministers of God cannot be ministers of the world and its occupations.*"²⁴ But the line between affairs of state and the responsibilities of the parish priest had never been clear in practice. For moral as well as conservative political reasons, parish priests in rural Puebla could not step back as passive spectators of the worldly affairs of the *doctrina*. Their moral responsibilities had always been partly temporal and the farther they were from a provincial capital the more difficult it was to enforce the new provisions, or for the state to get along without the *cura's* active participation in public affairs. One result was more disputes between priests and district magistrates of the kind documented in these investigations.

The growing conflicts over dominion between *curas* and district magistrates at the end of the eighteenth century also had to do with the magistrates themselves, encouraged by the royal decrees that worked to enlarge the secular state and promised to extend the authority of the royal agents, and which seemed to many priests to be a frontal attack on the traditional partnership of the church and the state. *Subdelegados* like O'Farrill and lieutenants like Rafael Ramos in the 1790s treated the priests in their districts as inferiors rather than partners in the work of colonial administration, imperiously and inflexibly encroaching on the priest's customary authority. They proclaimed their superiority, told Indians not to obey the *cura*, and in-

sulted priests in public. These were not new events but they happened with a new frequency and animus in the last decades of the colonial period. District magistrates now were quick to blame the parish priest for any disorder directed against them, and they were just as quick to respond with force instead of negotiation. If Sánchez Tagle and Ramos are representative, perhaps this was because more of the district officials in the late eighteenth century were military officers and fewer were lawyers. Viceroy Revillagigedo's instruction to his successor in 1794 spoke of his *subdelegados* as ignorant persons, knowing little of the law.²⁵ He blamed this situation largely on their reduced income since the elimination of the *repartimientos de mercancías* (they were now paid a salary of 5 percent of the tribute collected, plus judicial fees for services rendered).

The delicate balance of overlapping responsibilities, rivalries, and cooperation between rural priests and district magistrates that had operated in a clumsy, perhaps unplanned but often effective way for generations seemed to be breaking down at the end of the eighteenth century, with unsettling results for the rulers and the ruled. *Audiencia* judges and Viceroys deplored the tyranny of the parish priests, the vehemence with which they answered the changing government policies and the growing authority of the *subdelegados*, but they also worried about abuses of office by the magistrates that could have equally disruptive effects on Indian villagers. Above all, they feared that the violent confrontations and numerous disputes between *curas* and *subdelegados* or *corregidores* served as a bad example for the Indians, opening the way to rebellion and "perpetual disobedience."²⁶

The Bishop of Puebla in 1799 saw the disputes and unsettled circumstances of district government leading to Indian unrest and insolence, but he placed the blame on patron withdrawal, on the end of the traditional services of the parish priest, and on the bold and irresponsible conduct of the magistrates:²⁷

"This humble and religious education which the temper of our time calls paltry and timid has been most useful to the government. For about three centuries these domains of Your Majesty have been held without need of armed force, in the firmest peace, showing love for the sovereign and the constant loyalty of the best vassals in the world. But since the authority of the párrocos has been limited, forbidding them to mete out moderate punishment which as fathers and teachers they used for the correction of their parishioners, and since those in charge of justice in the pueblos -true parasites of the state, men usually without roots or good habits (like the one in Quimixtlán)- have made a point of persuading the Indians that the priest can only confess and preach, the Indians have begun to become insolent. There is not an hacienda owner who has not complained of their false pride and poor service. When they are notified of government orders that do not suit their taste, their disturbances are continuous. And if they lose respect for the Church (which will inevitably

happen if imprisonment of priests continues and the ecclesiastics lose their voice in public life) there will be no choice but to resort to force to contain a people who on the outside are extremely humble and submissive but underneath are filled with boundless malice and unalterable hatred for their conquerors."

3

Another notable pattern to emerge from this evidence, perhaps less confined to the late eighteenth century or to the Indian districts of Puebla, is the political tension between center and periphery within districts. This tension was expressed especially in the problematic relationship between the *cabecera* and the *sujetos*. In the Puebla cases and elsewhere in central and southern Mexico the *cabecera* was the center of the non-Indian world in the district, the place that was most regularly connected to provincial and viceregal interests and influences. It was the center of colonial authority and the home of the *corregidor* or *subdelegado* (if he lived in the district). His relatives usually gathered there along with the Spanish merchants, shopkeepers, tax collectors, lieutenants, and *casta* artisans. The Indians of the *cabecera* were more often able to communicate in Spanish, and Indian 'caciques' -noblemen, men of authority- were concentrated there.

The authority of the *cabecera* extended out to the *sujetos*, to the obvious advantage of the *cabecera*. Indians from outlying areas in the district were required to do service in the *cabecera*; taxes were paid to officials from the *cabecera*; and the *corregidor's repartimiento* was an especially onerous demand from the district center that interfered with the local economy. Even the saints were partisans in this hierarchy of center and periphery. Santiago was the patron of the *cabecera* of Tecali "and its district", which meant that *sujetos* with their own patron saints to support must supply food and money for the *fiesta titular* in Tecali whether they wanted to or not. Despite being the meeting point for many of the district's ties to the larger colonial world, the *cabecera* was spiritually isolated from its outlying communities. Like Father Guridi, the *cabecera's* non-Indian residents viewed their town more as an enclave that looked out to the provincial and viceregal capitals rather than toward the hinterland that made them important. The *corregidores* and *subdelegados* were temporary appointees who rarely ventured outside the *cabecera*. They were known to Indians in outlying villages mainly as the distant figures who demanded tribute payments through their collectors, who required them to buy their cattle, and who passed judgment in violations of colonial law.

The *sujetos*, by contrast, were more Indian and ordinarily less in touch with district politics. Few non-Indians lived there and few of the villagers spoke Spanish. Lieutenants of the *corregidores* sometimes resided among them but it was the parish priest who, if he remained for more than a few years, most embodied the formal colonial system

in the Indian *pueblo* as interpreter of the imperial language and law, as figure of paternal authority, as priest of the new religion, and as potential adviser. And it was the parish priest who protected his own authority by confronting the *corregidor's* and the *cabecera's* infringements on local interests and failing to implement some district orders. The *corregimientos* and *subdelegaciones* were divided into smaller parish units that acquired their own political identities with the encouragement of their priest and sometimes sought independence from the *cabecera*. There was some tension in being a parish seat but not a district capital. The case of Toxtepec documented here was not unique. Many *doctrinas*, especially ones that became larger than their *cabeceras* in the late eighteenth century, chafed at serving the interests of an unheeding district center and began to pressure the colonial government to grant them their own district status.²⁸ These villagers would have understood Miguel de Unamuno's observation about Madrid that it was "*a stomach, not a brain.*"

Perhaps more than any other cleavage, center and periphery shaped district politics in colonial Mexico. Ethnic and bureaucratic cleavages were important in these Puebla cases, too -Indian *sujetos* and partly non-Indian *cabeceras*; priests as authorities in the outlying areas, *corregidores* and *subdelegados* in the *cabecera*- but the perceived interests of the center working against the periphery usually overrode these other divisions: in none of the Puebla cases did the parish priests in the *cabeceras* join their brothers in the countryside to oppose the *corregidor*. The Indian *caciques* and *principales* of the *cabeceras* (and Indians still outnumbered non-Indians in these headtowns) also supported the *corregidor* in district affairs. They were the temporary soldiers who joined him in occasional expeditions into the district to collect unpaid taxes and demand obedience to his orders. It was the Indian *gobernador* of Zacatlán whom the *corregidor* sent as his special representative to investigate purported violations of election procedures in San Baltasar.

CONCLUSION

The overlapping responsibilities and rivalries between *cura* and *corregidor* that were inherent in the colonial administration of New Spain before the late eighteenth century held potentially explosive tensions, but they also provided an important check against personal power and arbitrary acts of either official. This helps explain how the Spanish state ruled in remote district without a standing army or a large police force. Ideally a balance of polite but cautious cooperation should exist between the *curas* and district judges that would prevent either outright conflict or collusion between the two. Such countervailing power served the interests of the Crown as a way to check arbitrary rule by royal agents and ensure that serious disputes at the district level would be appealed to higher courts more directly con-

nected to the King, thereby preserving at least a semblance of justice that could reduce the chance of an anti-colonial war by Indian subjects. Some competition among district officials also could benefit the Indian *pueblos*. It gave them an opportunity to maneuver for their own benefit in the administrative hierarchy. Unless the priests and magistrates were in league, there would be a natural ally for the Indians in one or the other when local disputes arose. And both the priests and the higher levels of the colonial government shared an interest in maintaining corporate Indian villages as social and political units to counter the independent position of private estates.

This hypothesis of rivalry and balance in district politics needs verification for other places and periods. It may be that as mostly peninsular or creole Spaniards with urban ties, the priests and magistrates had more of an affinity for each other in the midst of Indian strangers than the Puebla investigations indicate. For example, Stanley and Barbara Stein, in their *The Colonial Heritage of Latin America*, posit that *corregidores*, priests, and town officials combined to form a solid core of political power at the local level.²⁹ One of the complaints in the *comunero* rebellions of Nueva Granada (modern Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador) in the 1780s was that *corregidores* and parish priests worked together to exploit the Indians.³⁰ This complaint in itself suggests that checks and balances between these officials were expected and desired. For Nueva Granada, a structural reason existed for complicity: the salaries of priests in Indian parishes there were paid from the Indian tribute tax collected by the *corregidores*.

The Bourbon political reforms may have strengthened the Crown's hand in America and conceived the state in more modern, categorical terms, but by reducing the influence of *curas* in public affairs they led to sharper disputes between parish priests and district magistrates, and the weakening of a traditional hierarchy of patronage and authority that threatened the old ideal balance between competing and overlapping political agents.³¹ The *subdelegado's* formal authority grew at the expense of rural priests. The *subdelegados* -tied to the *cabecera*, tax collection, and military organization- embodied the center in the periphery. They were enforcers of the King's law, often inflexible and unimaginative in the way they went about it. Few were trained in law or interested in mediating between impersonal, abstract colonial decrees and the specific needs and exceptional circumstances of their subjects. *Curas* who, as the Bishop of Puebla recognized, were political intermediaries between colonial centers and the Indian village periphery, were losing their formal position in the political system under the later Bourbons. After 1790 their wordy written objections to the encroachments and abuses of *subdelegados* no longer carried much weight and state agents now looked upon their more dramatic political gestures on behalf of tradition and village autonomy as treason. They were on the way to becoming a professional class more than active partners in the enterprise of the state. Here, in a small way, is the trend that Charles Hale has illuminated so well for

the nineteenth century in Mexico: the rise of the secular state at the expense of the church and the local community, and its culmination in the Liberals' War of Reform and the Porfirian system.

For Indian villages, the declining leverage of parish priests in the colonial bureaucracy and the growing importance of the *subdelegados* meant a loss in local political resources, new difficulty in limiting the extractions of the market, and greater estrangement from the colonial state. The logical extension of this process has been described by Sidney Tarrow in his study of politics in peripheral communities of Italy and France:³²

"Where local political resources are weak and the mechanisms of local-national relations dominated by the center, to the burdens of peripheral decline will be added the indifference of the state."

The War of Independence interrupted this process of domination and weakened the state, but the beneficiaries in political power over the next century appear to have been the *hacendados* and political bosses more than villages and priests.

ENDNOTES

1. Joel S. Migdal, *Peasants, Politics, and Revolution. Pressures Toward Political and Social Change in the Third World* (Princeton, 1974), 35-36.

2. Each investigation fills at least one *legajo* in the Archivo General de Indias, Seville (hereafter AGI): Tecali in Audiencia de México, legs. 839-841; Zacatlán in Audiencia de México, leg. 1939; Tetela de Xonotla and Quimixtlán in Indiferente General, leg. 3027.

3. Information in this and the following paragraph comes from Peter Gerhard, *A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain* (Cambridge, 1972), 255-256, 388-389; *Puebla en cifras* (Mexico City, 1944); *Memoria sobre la administración del Estado de Puebla en 1849* (Mexico City, 1850); and *Regiones económico-agrícolas de la república mexicana* (Tacubaya, 1936), 732-747.

4. Agustín de Vetancurt, *Teatro mexicano* (3 Vols., Madrid, 1960-1961), III, 187-188.

5. All information for this section on Tecali comes from AGI, Audiencia de México, legs. 839-841.

6. This was not the first time that district officials had burst into the church without the priest's permission. Witnesses said that lieutenants were in the habit of entering during Mass in search of Indians who owed tribute.

7. I have discussed the divide-and-rule approach and the central place of the *pueblo* in colonial government in William B. Taylor, *Drinking, Homicide, and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages* (Stanford, 1979), Chapters 5 and 6, and in "Colonial Land and Water Rights of New Mexico Indian Pueblos," (Report to the US District Court of New Mexico, Exhibit JP-16, in State of New Mexico v. Aamodt, US Civil No. 6639, 1978).

8. All information for this section on Zacatlán comes from AGI, Audiencia de México, leg. 1939.

9. The special planting was distributed among the following *pueblos de indios*: (fan. = *fanegas*; alm. = *almudes*):

	town	fan.	alm.		town	fan.	alm.
1.	Zacatlán	50		7.	Zapotitlán	6	
	Barrio Xicolapa	4			Zongosotla	6	
	San Cristóbal	10			Huisila	14	
2.	Sgo. Chianauapan	8		Nanacatlán	5		
	Aguistla	4	3	Tustla	3		
3.	Auacatlán	10	6	8.	Atlequisayan	4	6
	San Marcos	4			Concepción	2	6
	San Francisco	5			Osenolacasgule	6	
	San Andrés	5			Cashucan	6	6
	San Antonio	12		9.	Huitlapan	9	6
4.	Tepesintla	17			Chipahuatlán	6	
	San Baltasar	4			Zitlala	6	
	Tonalisco	10			San Martinito	3	
5.	Auistlan	12		Yxtepeque	12		
	Tecpatlán	8		10.	Olintla	14	
	Tugupango	7			Huehuetla	14	
	Coyayango	6		11.	Xopala	13	
6.	Comacautla	3			Chicontla	8	
	San Bernardino		9		Patla	14	
	Tapayula	7			Tlaclantongo	8	
	Coatepec	6					

10. The priest of Zacatlán in this case and the priest of Tecali in the preceding case took no part in the protest against the district magistrates.

11. All information for this section on Quimixtlán and Tetela de Xonotla comes from AGI, Indiferente General, leg. 3027.

12. These problems between priests and district officials over jurisdiction, political power, and personal ambition in the late eighteenth century were not confined to the Sierra region of Puebla. The Archivo General de Indias, Indiferente General, leg. 3027, contains another lengthy case from 1797 for Chietla in the sugar-producing low country of southwest Puebla in which the *subdelegado*, Domingo Saavedra, violated the immunity of the local church, cursing and shouting as he arrested a vagrant there during Mass. Witnesses called in this case consistently testified that Saavedra was threatening and provocative toward local priests, declaring himself to be "the Pope, King, and Bishop," and demanding that the priests do strictly as he ordered. Four lieutenant priests had left the parish during his short tenure. One other jurisdictional dispute between a parish priest and a *subdelegado* is recorded in this *legajo*: against Vicente Zapata, the *cura* of Huatusco, for a whipping and other infringements on the royal jurisdiction.

13. As stated by Francis Brooks, "Parish and Cofradía in Eighteenth-Century Mexico" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1976), 15, 41.

14. B. M. de Moxó, *Cartas mejicanas escritas por d. Benito María de Moxó, año de 1805* (Genova, 1838), 16-17.

15. D. A. Brading, "El clero mexicano y el movimiento insurgente de 1810," in *Relaciones. Estudios de Historia y Sociedad*, 2:5 (1981), 5-26.

16. José Miguel Guridi y Alcocer, *Apuntes de la vida de d. José Miguel Guridi y Alcocer, formados por él mismo en fines de 1801 y principios del siguiente de 1802* (Mexico City, 1906).

17. *Apuntes de la vida de d. José Miguel Guridi y Alcocer*, 71.

18. *Apuntes de la vida de d. José Miguel Guridi y Alcocer*, 155.

19. University of Texas, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, Mexican Manuscripts (hereafter UT), G-15, "Documentos relativos al clero en la Nueva España, 1756 a 1817."

20. The manual of responsibilities of parish priests in late colonial Spanish America that was studied by many Mexican *curas* is the fat *Itinerario para parrochos de indios, en que se tratan las materias mas particulares, tocantes à ellos, para su buena administración* (2nd. ed., Antwerp, 1726), first published in 1688 by Alonso de la Peña Montenegro. It is a detailed guide to the traditional expectations and duties of the parish clergy.
21. UT, G-15, June 30, 1768, "Reglas para que los naturales de estos reynos sean felices en lo espiritual y temporal."
22. *Ordenanza general formada de orden de Su Magestad y mandada imprimir y publicar para el gobierno e instrucción de intendentes subdelegados y demás empleados en Indias* (Madrid, 1803), 47.
23. *Ordenanza general formada de orden de Su Magestad*, 46-47.
24. UT, G-15, Sept. 1, 1803.
25. *Instrucciones que los virreyes de Nueva España dejaron a sus sucesores* (2 vols., Madrid, 1873), II, 45.
26. AGI, Audiencia de México, leg. 839, exp. 59.
27. AGI, Indiferente General, leg. 3027.
28. See the chapters by García Martínez and Dehouve in this volume.
29. Stanley and Barbara Stein, *The Colonial Heritage of Latin America* (Oxford, 1970), 81.
30. Jane M. Loy, "Forgotten Comuneros; The 1781 Revolt in the Llanos de Casanare," in *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 61 (1981), 235-257, esp. 250.
31. Arturo Valenzuela, *Political Brokers in Chile. Local Government in a Centralized Polity* (Durham, 1977), 156, has a good discussion of patron-client and categorical forms of association in local politics.
32. Sidney Tarrow, *Between Center and Periphery. Grassroots Politicians in Italy and France* (New Haven, 1977), 3.