

CHAPTER 13

José Antonio da Silva

Marriage and Concubinage in Colonial Brazil

Muriel S. Nazzari

By the late eighteenth century, Brazil exceeded two million inhabitants, and the centers of population had shifted from the coastal sugar zones of the Northeast to the southeastern captaincies. The discovery of substantial gold deposits by the 1680s in the interior prompted a major demographic shift to the frontier captaincies or regions of Minas Gerais, Mato Grosso, and Goiás as people of all racial and class backgrounds rushed to seek their fortunes in the gold fields. New transportation networks and commercial routes developed to serve these growing settlements, but by the 1750s gold production began to decline slowly. Nevertheless, the demographic center of the colony had shifted decisively. Bolstered by the importation of large numbers of slave laborers, sugar production expanded rapidly in the southeastern captaincies by the 1790s. This expansion also spawned the cultivation of foodstuffs, grazing of livestock, and production of other exportable commodities such as tobacco, cotton, rice, and, later, coffee. The transfer in 1763 of the viceregal capital from Salvador in Bahia to Rio de Janeiro reflected the socioeconomic changes that were transforming Brazil by the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

At the periphery of these changes was São Paulo, long Brazil’s gateway to the interior. In the seventeenth century, this city served as the staging ground for the expeditions of bandeirantes who roamed the interior provinces from the Amazon to Spanish Paraguay in search of indigenous slaves for coastal plantations. These bandeirantes were some of the first to discover the gold deposits later in the century. Once the gold rush began, São Paulo prospered, supplying foodstuffs and serving as a conduit for commerce to and from the coast. In 1711 it was given the official rank of city and, by 1803, São Paulo had a population of nearly 25,000. As the city’s economic role expanded, the local society evolved into an urban center with well-established social hierarchies.

Captain José Antonio da Silva was a prominent citizen in the rural parish of Santana, in the province of São Paulo, and his life and loves mirror the social realities of the city and its hinterland. The social mores of the day required José Antonio to marry someone of the same social rank as defined by ancestry, honor, and race. In keeping with this custom, he married a suitable woman, doña Clara Maria Ribeira, but the couple had no
children. His marriage and Church prohibitions against concubinage, however, did not stop him from engaging in a series of illicit relationships with women beneath his social station and siring several illegitimate children. By confining his sexual liaisons to women considered his "inferiors" in class, race, and wealth, however, José Antonio's dalliances did nothing to subvert the prevailing social hierarchies. In fact, they actually reinforced the patriarchal societal order. Ironically, several of the women in the rakish captain's life actually reaped some tangible benefits from their relationships with him. His wife, Clára Maria, ended her days a wealthy woman, even marrying a much younger man. Two of his mistresses, Gertrudes Pires and Ignacia França, also married well and even improved their qualidade—census takers changed their racial categorizations from bastard (meaning mestiza) or parda (meaning dark-skinned) to white. Two of his slave mistresses also managed to secure freedom for the children that they bore José Antonio. Despite every effort by Brazilian elites to impose rigid social hierarchies, as the life of José Antonio da Silva demonstrates, disorder often prevailed over colonial notions of order.

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In the realm of sexual relations, order was difficult to maintain in colonial Brazilian society. The Church prescribed marriage as the only acceptable context for a sexual relationship, envisioning a society in which most adults were married, except for religious. Although such an ideal had never truly existed in Europe, it was especially hard to achieve in the Americas, in part because of the difficulty in enforcing Church rules in a colonial society. Both the Church and the civil society believed that marriage should be between equals in age, fortune, and social status. Qualidade in Portuguese (or calidade in Spanish) was a complex term that included issues of ancestry and honor and, in the Americas, also came to embrace race.

Since most of the Portuguese settlers who went to Brazil in the early years were male, they found few European women to marry who were equals in "quality." As a result, they frequently formed liaisons with women of other races and lower social status that were condemned by the Church and seen as disorderly. But the resulting disorder in sexual relations in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies ironically helped to maintain a different sort of order in the highly hierarchical racial system that was evolving. Brazil was no exception to this process. Both scholars of the early colony and ordinary Brazilians of the twenty-first century well know that stable nuclear families (characterized by marital fidelity) were exceedingly rare in the early years. Scholars have found a large proportion of illegitimate children in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and only a small percentage of the population was legally married.

This article describes the lives of a few residents of the municipality of São Paulo in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—in as much detail as the documents will allow—to illustrate the way in which illicit (disorderly) sexual relationships reinforced the racial hierarchy of the province. It will describe illicit sexual relationships, marriages characterized by differences in qualidade, and how the racial category of individuals could change in the regional censuses depending on their ownership of property, their marital status, or the sexual relationship that they maintained with an important person. The foundations of this study rest on a wide range of primary source materials: censuses, wills and settlements of estates, parish registers of baptism and marriage, Church processes for marriage and dispensations for consanguinity, the minutes of the municipal council of São Paulo, and documents in the Desembargo do Paço (the Portuguese high court that, among other things, legitimized illegitimate children).

The documents portray a colonial São Paulo where patriarchs exercised great power over women, particularly in sexual matters. The power of these patriarchs was based not only on their gender but also on their race and wealth. Yet the picture is not entirely one-sided. Colonial women made choices too and, in some cases, appear to have used their wealth and status to exert power over men. As a consequence, gender intersected with race, economic wealth, and social class, compounded by the almost absolute power that owners had over slaves.

Although much information will emerge about the lives of several individuals and their families, the main character in this tale is Captain José Antonio da Silva, commander of the militia in the rural Paulista neighborhood of Santana during the last quarter of the eighteenth century.¹ He and his wife were childless, but he had numerous illicit sexual relationships and fathered several illegitimate children. In the documents concerning the settlement of his estate, it is clear that the captain and his wife had given a small farm within their property to Gertrudes Pires, who was the mother of his eight illegitimate children.²

At the time there were actually two José Antonio da Silvas in São Paulo. Santana's militia captain was born in Lisbon around 1742, the legitimate son of Adrião da Silva and his wife, Joséfa Theresia, and was always known only by his name, José Antonio da Silva.³ The other, a man almost ten years younger, was born in São Paulo and was always
called José Antonio da Silva, Paulista (a resident of the city and province of São Paulo). The registration for José Antonio da Silva, Paulista's marriage indicates that he had been a foundling, baptized in 1751, and raised by Anna da Silva Pacheco. Following the custom of marriage equality, he also married a foundling. He was described in an ecclesiastical document from 1800 as a businessman. José Antonio da Silva, Paulista, however, was never connected to the neighborhood of Santana, and he appears in none of its censuses.

This is not the case with the Portuguese José Antonio da Silva, who already appeared in the first census of Santana (1765) as a single man, twenty-five years old, and a farmer with considerable capital for the time, 800$000 (800,000 reis). In that census there were eighty-three households in the rural parish of Santana, and only 31 percent of them (twenty-six households) declared any capital at all. There was only one household, headed by the widow Maria de Oliveira Furtado, which recorded more in the census than the young José Antonio da Silva; she had 1,659$000. One other single man, Domingos Gomes de Amaral, also declared capital of 800$000. Everybody else had less; the average in Santana was 264$154. This amount was slightly less than the average for the whole city of São Paulo, which was 296$154. Thus, José Antonio da Silva was already a prosperous farmer in Santana in 1765. Where did he obtain this wealth? It seems unlikely that he brought it from Portugal. In that case he would probably have been a merchant, establishing himself in Rio de Janeiro or in some other coastal urban area, not in a rural parish of São Paulo. A more likely answer is that as an even younger man he joined the gold rush in Minas Gerais, Cuiabá, or Mato Grosso, making enough money to settle later as a prosperous farmer in São Paulo.

When he died thirty-two years later in 1797, he and his wife still lived in the rural neighborhood of Santana, although they owned three houses in the city of São Paulo, two of two stories and one of one story. They probably lived in one of the houses whenever they were in the city and rented the other two. In Santana they owned a large agricultural property that included five different houses. The main house included an oratory with images of the Virgin Mary and several saints. Two houses were used to process sugarcane and make cane liquor (aguadiente), and the fourth was probably the slave quarters. The house of Gertrudes Pires was listed separately with the small farm surrounding it and a walled orchard. José Antonio and his wife owned cattle, sheep, and twenty-eight slaves. When he died, their estate was worth almost 6 contos, or 6,000$000, which included considerable cash, bars of gold, and bills of credit. He and his wife were undoubtedly the wealthiest family in the neighborhood, and becoming a captain of militia was always related to wealth in colonial Brazil. Santana was not in itself a well-off neighborhood, however, so José Antonio da Silva probably was not one of the richest Paulistas. In addition, the extant document does not reveal how much of the money in his estate at the time of his death had been brought to the marriage by the dowry of his wife, dona Clara Maria Ribeira.

Moreover, José Antonio seems to have been a controversial figure, despite his wealth and important position in the militia. One of his duties as captain was to sign the yearly census of the neighborhood, but in the 1783 census an ensign signed in his place. José Antonio was in jail. In all of the thirteen censuses of Santana during this period, this is the only case of someone listed as being in jail at the time of the census. The reason for his incarceration remains unknown. It might have been for some trivial matter, such as not collaborating with a municipal council order that all neighbors contribute to the repair of the Santana bridge or to the construction of the Santana stretch of the road from São Paulo to Goiás. He might even have run afoul of the Church, which also had the power to jail persons. Furthermore, José Antonio died without making a will, because two men shot and killed him at his farm. He was clearly a man who had enemies.

On the other hand there are numerous references to José Antonio da Silva in the eighteenth-century records of São Paulo's municipal council, indicating that he was an important person in the larger community. In 1765, when he was still a young man in his twenties, José Antonio was listed as an almotacel (lieutenant). Ten years later he was already a captain and a justice of the peace; he presided over the municipal council of the city of São Paulo. He was clearly a man with power not only in Santana but also in São Paulo.

José Antonio had numerous sexual relationships with women over the years. One early one, mentioned in the judicial process for the settlement of his estate, produced a filho natural (illegitimate child), Francisco de Paula da Silva, who filed as an heir. A filho natural was a child of a man and woman who had no canonical impediments to marriage and thus could have married. Francisco's baptismal certificate reveals that while José Antonio da Silva was still unmarried, he became involved with a single woman, Ignacia Franca, the mother of his child and also a resident of Santana. In January 1766, when she was twenty-two or twenty-three and he was around twenty-six, they baptized Francisco together. José Antonio da Silva was named in the parish register as the father, which was unusual. Most baptismal records for illegitimate children gave the mother's name but claimed that the father was unknown. Listing a father's name was dangerous because the Church prosecuted prolonged and scandalous cases of concubinage. Having his name on the baptismal record
suggests that José Antonio da Silva and Ignacia were no longer living together and that their sexual relationship had ended. As a result, a prominent person such as José Antonio could openly acknowledge the child.

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Paulista society was strongly endogamous; people married only their social equals. Whenever any inequality existed in a relationship, it was usually the wife who was superior to her husband in wealth and status. Any liaison between a man and a woman lower in the social hierarchy, whether because of her race or her lack of property, was always carried on outside of marriage. As a result, despite acknowledging his filho natural, José Antonio probably never intended to marry Ignacia Franca because she was not his social equal according to the criteria of the time. In fact, Ignacia was listed in the 1765 census of Santana as living with her parents, Francisco Franco and his wife, Joanna de Aguiar, and three brothers. Her father declared no capital a quota to the census taker, and his race is noted as bastard, the term used in São Paulo to denote persons with a mixture of Indian and European blood. In two subsequent censuses (1778, 1783) her father was listed as a bastard, but in two other ones (1779, 1780) he was called a pardo (dark skinned). Pardo was a term used then mostly for people with a mixture of white and black blood, but it was applied sometimes to individuals with any racial mixture, even to Indians. In any case, her father was not considered white. According to the standards of the day, Ignacia was inferior to José Antonio both in race and in wealth and was therefore not a suitable match for him.

The census of 1778 listed José Antonio da Silva as thirty-seven years old and already married to thirty-five-year-old dona Clara Maria Ribeira. She had not been a resident of Santana, since she did not appear in the censuses of 1765 or 1768. A much later census in 1802 indicated her birthplace as Rio de Janeiro. The parish record of their wedding is missing, however, making it impossible to know exactly when it took place. She undoubtedly must have brought the customary property to the marriage with her dowry, or it is unlikely that José Antonio would have married her. She was probably also viewed as white, because none of the censuses listing the couple records her race as different from her husband's. Nonetheless, in the 1798 census, after her husband died, she is listed as "Clara Maria Ribeira viúva" (widow). Once again, however, in the 1802 census, after her remarriage, she was again classified as white.

In the settlement of José Antonio's estate, the documents indicate that dona Clara Maria Ribeira did not know how to sign her name. Illiteracy was not uncommon for propertied women in eighteenth-century São Paulo, even though many of the wealthier Paulista wives and daughters had learned to read and write. Dona Clara Maria may also have been older than her husband. In the first two censuses she is shown as two years younger than her husband (1778, 1779), but in the next one she is listed as a year younger; in the next two censuses she is recorded as from one to four years younger. In the three censuses in the nineties (1795, 1796, 1797) she is shown as five or six years older. Given that she was probably older than her husband, illiterate, and had possible traces of Indian or African blood, it is all the more likely that she brought a substantial contribution of property, slaves, or cash to the marriage.

The next sexual partner of José Antonio da Silva was Gertrudes Pires. He was already married when he started his relationship with her by the time of the 1778 census. Gertrudes was listed there as the daughter of a white man, Salvador Pires Monteiro, and his bastard wife, Anna de Oliveira, both residents of Santana. Gertrudes was considerably younger than Ignacia Franca, only seven by the census of 1765. According to the data, she lived with her parents up through the census of January 1779 but was no longer listed with them in 1780; neither was she listed in José Antonio's household in that year. Three years later, however, in the 1783 census, Gertrudes, twenty-four years old, and her son, Damazio, appeared in José Antonio's household as white agregados, a census classification that means a related or unrelated person who also lives in the household of a nuclear family, though not necessarily in the same house. The fact that Damazio was Gertrudes's child was not spelled out in the census.

In the 1787 listing, Damazio and his younger sister and brother, who were born in the interim, were considered as foundlings. Eight years later, in the census of 1795, Gertrudes and her children were again categorized as agregados without listing the relationship between the mother and her children. In the following year's census, 1796, Gertrudes was listed as an agregada, but her children were considered foundlings, as they also were in the 1797 census, which did not even record their mother's name. For some reason, no census taker identified the children as belonging to Gertrudes, despite the fact that in other households, a census classification exists to identify the children of agregadas even if they did not live in the same house. The details of the relationship between José Antonio da Silva and his mistress Gertrudes Pires are thereby obscured. Moreover, the baptismal records of these children gave their mother's name but listed the father as unknown.

The settlement of José Antonio da Silva's estate mentions that he also had two mulatto daughters with two of his slave women. His widow made a long declaration that those young women, Maria and Thomazia, were agregadas and should not be counted as slaves. Previous censuses corroborate that their father considered them free—while they are listed as slaves through 1780, they are recorded as agregadas pardas from 1783. Despite dona Clara Maria's protestations, however, in the 1802 census, after she had remarried, Maria and Thomazia were listed as two of the
couple's sixteen slaves and the only mulattos that she and her new husband owned. It is not clear whether or not they had been legally manumitted in the 1780s. Their roles may not have changed in the household, thus making it easy to list them as slaves again in 1802. In the 1807 census, Clara Maria had died and her husband had remarried; Maria and Thomazia were not among his slaves. Perhaps Clara Maria formally manumitted them in her will, or else they may have passed to her heirs as slaves.

José Antonio always carried on his extramarital relationships with women who were inferior to him by class or race: his two slaves, who probably had little say in the matter; Ignacia Franca, who was probably of mixed Indian and white ancestry and whose family had no capital; and finally, with Gertrudes Pires from a somewhat “better” family, since her father was listed as white but had no capital. The disorderly sexual life of José Antonio da Silva reinforced these women’s lowly social status in the hierarchical society of São Paulo.

Did these women benefit in any way from these relationships? In all likelihood, they did, and the higher their original position, the more they benefited. The two slaves secured freedom for their children. Ignacia profited from her son’s inheritance, and after she finally married, she was listed (and apparently viewed) as white in the census. Gertrudes gained the status of an agregada in José Antonio’s household and in later censuses was recorded as white, even after his death. In all likelihood she was probably seen as white by the larger society. She also acquired the farm and house. In addition, Luzia, one of the slaves listed in the 1797 census as José Antonio’s, appears as the property of Gertrudis in the 1798 census, together with her five children, suggesting that Luzia was also a gift. Finally, the lives of dona Clara Maria, Ignacia, and Gertrudes demonstrate that women with property in colonial Brazil could easily marry; all three of them remarried much younger men after José Antonio died.

Dona Clara Maria appears in the 1798 census, the year after her husband’s death, living with a young married couple who were agregados of her household and owning sixteen slaves, her share of slaves in the community property. Four years later, in 1802, census takers recorded that she had married Francisco Xavier de Moraes, who was only twenty-nine years old. Her age is listed as sixty-two, but she was undoubtedly even older. The records indicate that they had married only eleven months after José Antonio’s death. Francisco Xavier’s birth certificate put his age at only twenty-three when they wed.13 By the 1807 census dona Clara Maria had died, and her husband had remarried a woman in her twenties. By this time he held only seven slaves, his share of the community property that he had owned with Clara Maria. He had, in effect, bartered himself in exchange for the prospect of acquiring property, which later permitted him to marry a younger woman with little or no assets (since she appears not to have brought any slaves into the marriage).

Gertrudes Pires also wed a younger man, although the difference in their ages was not so great. The 1798 census recorded her as living alone with her eight children (the eldest was seventeen years old) and six slaves (Luzia and her five children). Gertrudes’s offspring could not inherit from their father for they were adulterine illegitimate children. By the 1802 census, Gertrudes, who was then forty-two, had married Reginaldo Damazio da Silva, age thirty-three, and they lived with her children and nine slaves. The parish register indicates that they had married in 1800. Reginaldo apparently owned three adult slaves, which added to their joint property. Nonetheless, neither Reginaldo nor Gertrudes appears in later censuses of Santana; they must have moved away. Her eldest son, Damazio Antonio da Silva, married and continued to live in Santana, perhaps on the property originally given to Gertrudes.14 He also married well because he and his wife were listed in the 1807 census as owning six slaves; by 1825 that number had increased to nine.

The documents for the settlement of José Antonio da Silva’s estate are unclear about whether Francisco de Paula da Silva, his natural son, actually received his inheritance. The will of José Antonio’s father indicates that he had a brother in Lisbon who was a collateral heir. After Francisco filed as an heir, the judge who carried out the division of the estate had the part belonging to the deceased auctioned and deposited in the Juiz dos Auzentes (court dealing with intestate goods), probably reserved for the brother in Lisbon. Francisco, however, placed an embargo on the proceeds to keep them from going abroad.

It is possible that he did inherit since there is every indication that Francisco prospered over the course of his lifetime. He first lived with his mother and grandfather until the grandfather died and then continued living with his mother. In all of this time, the family owned no slaves. In the 1798 census, however, less than a year after his father died, Francisco had acquired an adult male slave. The inheritance that he would have received from his father amounted to over 2 contos, and one slave was worth much less than that amount. Nevertheless, it is possible that Francisco, like many other rural Paulistas of that period, had not owned the land that he worked. He may have invested his inheritance in land, cattle, and one slave (that census reported no property except slaves). He did prosper thereafter; by 1802 he and his mother owned four slaves, produced and sold aguardiente, and kept fifteen horses and six pigs. By 1807, when Francisco was forty years old, these assets had increased substantially. By 1816, however, census takers recorded that he was no longer in Santana. In all likelihood he had died, because the slaves recorded as living in his mother’s household were the same ones recorded as part of
their joint household. In fact, she probably had inherited them from her deceased son.

Ignacia Franca had become the head of her own household by 1787 and, like her father, was sometimes labeled in the census either as a bastard or a parda. Moreover, by the 1790s, census takers consistently reported her age as less than it really was. In 1807 they recorded it as fifty-nine when in reality she was sixty-four. By the 1816 census, when her son no longer lived in the household, Ignacia had married Manoel Barboza Bueno, a white man from Minas Gerais. Manoel’s age was given as thirty-two and hers as fifty-nine when she was actually seventy-three! In the 1825 census she again appears as Manoel Barboza’s wife; his age was listed as forty-two and hers as sixty-nine, even though she must have been eighty-one. In addition, after her marriage she was always labeled white in the census.

Such marriages between older women and younger men run counter to the received wisdom that younger women marry older men for their money. In colonial Brazil, however, the reverse also happened. Men needed capital to establish themselves independently of their parents, since there were few other ways to earn a good living. For their part, older women often needed a man to manage their assets, thus allowing male and female needs to coincide in some cases. It seems likely, however, that public opinion frowned on such marriages. The records in the parish register, for example, show that both doña Clara Maria Ribeira’s second marriage and that of Gertrudes Pires required a special dispensation from the Church. Gertrudes and her future husband petitioned for the dispensation because “they wish to marry as quickly as possible for urgent reasons.”15 The fact that both weddings were carried out virtually in secret indicates some level of societal disapproval for the marriage of an older woman to a younger man.

Despite the illegitimate and disorderly relationship of both Ignacia Franca and Gertrudes Pires with José Antonio da Silva, both women improved their qualidade, gaining financial assets and being viewed as white. Flaunting Church notions of social order clearly advanced their wealth and social status, perhaps indicating that some women may have made a calculated choice to enter into a sexual liaison outside of wedlock.16 Slave women, however, could not make such decisions. Although some slaves who had a sexual relationship with their masters were given clothes or preferential treatment, most slave women could only hope to benefit by the manumission of their children or even of themselves. Not all masters freed their slave children or mistresses, but when they did so, it was a wonderful gift. In a few exceptional cases, the children of slaves and their masters were legitimized, even becoming their father’s heir. In a few rare cases the slave herself was manumitted and later married her master. Such cases usually occurred in regions where there were few white women, and they brought an unusual sense of order to the disorder of concubinage between masters and slaves.

The life of José Antonio da Silva and his intimate relationships with women demonstrate the tensions between colonial ideas about order and disorder and the realities of life in eighteenth-century Brazil. In his marriage, José Antonio conformed to the precepts of the Church as well as to society’s requirement that he marry someone who was his equal in wealth and status. His extramarital liaisons clearly flaunted the moral order of the Church, but because his dalliances were with women considered his inferiors in property and race, they still reinforced the hierarchical racial and class order. In these relationships, men drew power not only from their gender (in a patriarchal society) but also because they were the women’s superiors in class and race and, in the most extreme cases, because the female was a slave. Within this social system a woman entering into an extramarital relationship could, with luck, improve her own and her children’s material circumstances and even her qualidade.

NOTES

2. Arquivo do Estado de São Paulo (hereafter AESP), Inventários Não Publicados (hereafter INP), José Antonio da Silva, 1797, No. de ordem 569 c. 92.
3. I have calculated his approximate date of birth using his age as reported in the censuses of Santana for 1765, 1768, 1778, 1779, 1780, 1783, 1787, 1795, and 1797 in AESP, Maços de População, Bairro de Santana.
4. Arquivo da Cúria Metropolitana de São Paulo (hereafter ACMSP), Processos de Casamento da Sé, José Antonio da Silva, 6-57-2227.
5. ACMSP, Processos de Casamento, Reginaldo Damazo da Silva, 7-1-2511.
7. AESP, INP, No. de ordem 569, c. 92.
11. This was a census in which many people were classified as pardos, but it is clearly the same Clara Maria because her age is correct and she is listed as owning sixteen slaves, which corresponds to half of the number she owned with her husband.
12. See ACMSP, Registro de Casamentos, 7-31-2815, for the marriage of Damazio Antonio da Silva in 1803, which includes a copy of his baptismal certificate of 1780.
13. ACMSP, Livro de Casamentos da Sé, 1798, Francisco Xavier de Moraes, Clara Maria Ribeira.
15. ACMSP, Processos de Casamento, 1800, 7-1-2511, Reginaldo Damazo da Silva, Gertrudes Pires do Nascimento; ACMSP, Livros de Casamento da Sé, 1798, Francisco Xavier de Moraes, Clara Maria Ribeira.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Further information on marriage and concubinage in colonial Latin America can be found in Asuncion Lavrin, ed., Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); Lyman L. Johnson and Sonya Lipsett-Rivera, The Faces of Honor: Sex, Shame, and Violence in Colonial Latin America (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).


CHAPTER 14

Eugenio Sinanyuca
Militant, Nonrevolutionary Kuraka, and Community Defender

The Bourbon monarchy’s efforts to reform trade, mining policies, military organization, and patterns of colonial administration as well as to heighten fiscal pressures exacerbated existing political and social tensions in many Andean regions. In 1772, for example, the crown increased the sales tax (alcabala) from 2 percent to 4 percent on both colonial and European goods and only four years later raised the rate once again to 6 percent. The viceregal government also established customs houses in key cities and placed suboffices along major trade routes to collect sales taxes more effectively. Moreover, the crown disturbed regional trade patterns by removing Upper Peru (now Bolivia) from the Viceroyalty of Peru in 1776, placing it instead under the control of the newly created Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, with its capital in Buenos Aires. During this same period colonial officials made more accurate censuses of the indigenous population to ensure that tribute and other levies were collected efficiently. The net result was a dramatic upsurge in tax revenues, often accompanied by regional economic downturns that heightened local discontent. Such regional unrest among a wide array of social groups prompted a series of revolts between 1777 and 1780, but the most serious threats to Spanish authority came from the oppressed indigenous communities of Peru and Upper Peru between 1780 and 1783.

One of the most bloody revolts broke out southeast of Cuzco in Tinta (also called Canas y Canchis) and threatened to expel Spanish authorities from the old Inca heartland. The leader of the uprising was José Gabriel Condorcanqui, who took the name Tupac Amaru II after the Inca ruler who was executed by the Spanish in 1572. The Bourbon reforms had provoked considerable economic hardship in Tinta, worsening ethnic tensions among Andean communities and also conflicts over leadership positions. The corregidor, Antonio de Arriaga, exacerbated these problems by his heavy-handed administration of tribute and the reparto, the forced distribution and sale of goods by the corregidor to indigenous peoples and sometimes even to local Spaniards and mestizos. His policies led to