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***Murió comiendo rata: Power Relations in Pre-Sendero
Ayacucho, Peru, 1940-1983***

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While taking my first shuttle to the Ayacuchan community of Chuschi in 2007, I went over my archival notes with my research assistant, Alberto.¹ I told Alberto about Humberto Azcarza, a *mestizo* power holder who had been abusing Chuschi's indigenous peasantry non-stop between 1935 and 1975. Moments later, Alberto showed me an obscure text that he had come across, about the neighboring town of Quispillaccta. I leafed through the pages and began reciting a passage about a bloody battle that erupted between the peasants of Chuschi and Quispillaccta in 1960. The authors of the text, all of them Quispillacctinos, claimed that the

¹ An earlier version of this essay appeared under the title: "Local Power Relations in Ayacucho, Peru, 1940-1983" (Paper presented at the CLAH-AHA 2008 Meeting, Washington, D.C., 3-6 January 2008). I thank Christine Hunefeldt, Nancy Postero, Susan E. Ramirez, Eric Van Young, and especially my anonymous peer reviewer, for their thoughtful comments on previous drafts of this essay. I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Alberto Tucno and Julian Berrocal Flores for their invaluable assistance during my field research in Chuschi and Ayacucho City. Finally, I thank the Ford, Fulbright, and Guggenheim Foundations for providing me with the financial support necessary to complete this project.

Chuschinos had been led by Azcarza and another *mestizo* named Ernesto Jaime. These men, the authors argued, were not native Chuschinos but “foreigners” who had settled in the village as adults.

“That’s not true,” interrupted the woman sitting directly across from me, with whom I had been grinding knees for the past two hours.

“What makes you say that?” I asked.

The woman looked at me and smiled: “Humberto Azcarza was my grandfather.”

My heart sank. I could feel my face turning flush red. Moments earlier I had been talking about Humberto Azcarza as though he were a literary villain, all the while his granddaughter had been sitting right next to me! Rather than apologize, I decided to let her know about my research. The woman was quite friendly, and she seemed curious to know more. Ascarza’s granddaughter and I spent the next hour exchanging what we knew of certain names and episodes in Chuschino history. Some of them Humberto had told her when she was a young girl living in Chuschi. When we got off the shuttle around 8:00 a.m., I gave her my card and she invited us to come to her father’s house later that morning.

“Can I borrow that book?” she asked Alberto, referring to the one written by the Quispillacctinos. He complied, and Alberto, the son of *comuneros* (indigenous commoners), never saw the book again.²

* * *

This essay analyzes the power relationship between *comuneros* and *mestizo* notables in Chuschi, a community of mostly Quechua-speaking peasants in the Andean department of Ayacucho, Peru. Chuschi achieved national fame after the Peruvian Communist Party-Shining Path (PCP-SL) burned the local registry to the ground on 17 May 1980 on the eve of Peru’s first democratic elections after twelve years of military rule. The episode symbolized Shining Path’s Inicio de la Lucha Armada (Initiation of the Armed Struggle—ILA), for which Chuschi would serve as an early guerrilla stronghold. Given Chuschi’s historical significance with respect to the

² Field Notes, Chuschi (26 July 2007).

armed struggle, the community has received a good deal of scholarly and media attention in recent years. Understandably, this research has focused on Chuschi's experience during the immediate period of political violence (1980-2000).³ This study seeks to broaden our understanding of both Ayacucho and the political violence by exploring the nature of local power relationships in Chuschi in the forty years leading up to the armed conflict. This approach will help explain why some indigenous Ayacuchans initially supported Shining Path's "people's war."

The analysis that follows draws from and builds upon theories of moral economy. Conventional scholarship in moral economy emphasizes the subsistence ethic and legal/material concerns that drive rural power relationships.⁴ In his influential 1978 study on peasant revolutions, James C. Scott argued that the advent of capitalism and commercial agriculture caused landlords in Southeast Asia to abandon their longstanding social and economic commitments to the peasantry, thus giving peasants cause to support collective violence.⁵ During the 1980s and early 1990s, some scholars used this notion of moral economy to explain peasant support for Shining Path. Cynthia McClintock, for example, placed a subsistence crisis at the heart of Ayacuchan peasants' decision to support the Maoists.⁶ Similarly, Ronald Berg linked initial support for Shining Path in Andahuaylas to peasants' cries for "economic justice."⁷ The conclusions of these moral economists have since been contested, some of them heavily. A good deal of this criticism focused on the moral economists' analysis of economic structures, conditions, and relations. Samuel L. Popkin famously took issue with Scott's assertion that the breakdown of pre-capitalist institutions jeopardized peasant livelihood, arguing that "there is no need for dramatic subsistence crises before peasants in 'feudal' or subsistence areas will support revolutionaries."⁸ McClintock's detractors were equally

³ See Gorriti, *The Shining Path*, 17-20; Isbell, "Shining Path and Peasant Responses"; Sánchez Villagómez, *Pensar los senderos*. A notable exception is Isbell's *To Defend Ourselves*, which focuses on Chuschi's community structures during the 1970s.

⁴ E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy"; Scott, *The Moral Economy*.

⁵ Scott, *The Moral Economy*.

⁶ McClintock, "Why Peasants Rebel."

⁷ Berg, "Peasant Responses," 116.

⁸ Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*, 3, 28.

critical, raising questions as to the degree to which a subsistence crisis, if it existed at all, actually fomented peasant support for Shining Path.⁹

Notwithstanding these criticisms, a moral economy approach can still shed light on peasant support for Shining Path. The true value of this approach, however, may have less to do with modes of production or subsistence ethics and more with the function of morality itself. In an early article written during the height of the political violence, Nelson Manrique hypothesized that highland peasants were initially attracted to Shining Path because the guerrilla group offered a form of public morality, security, and order in the absence of an effective state bureaucracy.¹⁰ In order to prove this, of course, one must go beyond the years of immediate political violence to demonstrate that such a bureaucratic crisis existed in the first place. This essay does just that, offering concrete historical evidence to support what has until now been a matter of academic speculation. Setting aside the now drawn-out debate about economic relations and subsistence crises in 1980s Peru, I demonstrate that Ayacuchan peasants did set moral expectations for local power holders. While these expectations had an economic component, they were first and foremost cultural. Focusing on the implicit expectations that drove mid-twentieth century power relations in Ayacucho communities, my study thus emphasizes the cultural component of moral economy. Specifically, I highlight the tacit, morally established assumptions that indigenous peasants brought to their relationships with *all* local power holders—not just landlords. We can think of this implicit agreement as a kind of “power pact” in which peasants were willing to submit to and legitimize the dominion of local power holders provided that the latter lived up to these cultural expectations. Thinking of rural power relations in terms of a power pact helps us to understand why it is that indigenous peasants were willing to accept, tolerate, and even *reproduce* their subjugation to some power holders while simultaneously resisting the hegemony of others. More importantly, understanding the local contours of these power relations will enable us to contextualize peasant support for Shining Path, for it was the violators of the power pact

⁹ See, for example, Poole and Rénique, “The New Chroniclers of Peru.”

¹⁰ See, for example, Manrique, “La década de la violencia,” 157-58.

who bore the brunt of Shining Path justice during the initial years of the insurgency. Before delving into this pre-insurgency history, however, a brief exploration of Ayacucho and Shining Path is in order.

Ayacucho and Shining Path

Shining Path emerged in Ayacucho as a radical wing of the Peruvian Communist Party in the late-1960s, at a moment when global events such as the Cuban and Chinese revolutions had proven that alternative political “paths” were achievable in the Third World. But this was also a time when militaries were seizing executive power across Latin America, Peru included. In the 1970s the party thus went underground to develop its Maoist guerrilla strategy. The PCP-SL resurfaced in 1980 with its burning of ballot boxes in Chuschi to launch a full-fledged guerrilla insurgency in Ayacucho—this despite the fact that the Peruvian military government had relinquished its power and reestablished democratic governance. Shining Path leaders argued that despite the transfer of power, Ayacucho’s peasantry was still economically and politically marginalized, and that the landed elite still controlled the means of production throughout the countryside. Shining Path enjoyed initial support from indigenous peasant communities like Chuschi and throughout the Ayacuchan highlands. This was indeed an international phenomenon, as leftist guerrilla groups in nations such as El Salvador and Guatemala were also launching guerrilla campaigns that depended on indigenous and peasant support.¹¹ By late-1982, the Shining Path insurgency had spread throughout Peru and was posing a serious threat to the stability of the nation-state.

My scholarship is part of a recent effort by historians to contextualize the Peruvian insurrection. This effort began about ten years ago with Steve J. Stern’s edited volume, *The Shining and Other Paths*, which called for a more historically grounded analysis of the civil war. More recently, historians Cecilia Méndez, Jaymie Patricia Heilman, and Ponciano Del Pino have illustrated how the insurgency can be seen as the most recent and radical manifestation of an ongoing political dialogue

¹¹ See Whickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution*.

between Ayacuchan peasants and the Peruvian state.¹² My work builds on this nascent historiography, showing that local experience and cultural understandings played just as important a role in shaping indigenous peasants' responses to Shining Path as macro-level politics and economics.¹³ We need look no further than Chuschi for evidence of this.

Indigenous-Mestizo Relations in Pre-Insurgency Chuschi

Chuschi is the capital of a district that bears the same name in the region of Cagallo Province known as the Pampas River Valley. On the eve of the 1980s insurgency, the community had about 1,100 inhabitants, most of them Quechua-speaking peasants. The community was ideal for agricultural farming, encompassing a diverse ecological climate with fertile valleys and rivers at an altitude of about 10,000 feet and high grazing lands peaking at 15,000 feet. Chuschino farmers took advantage of this diverse ecology to produce a wide range of tubers, corn, and broad bean crops. Chuschi was in no way an isolated peasant community; it had a main road connecting the village to the departmental capital of Ayacucho City, about 125 kilometers to the northeast, which facilitated both commerce and social stratification. Some villagers even took up occupations as merchants in one of the handful of community stores or during local fairs.¹⁴

In her ethnography *To Defend Ourselves*, anthropologist Billie Jean Isbell argues that there were two essential social groups in 1970s Chuschi: the *comuneros* and the *qalas*. The categories carried specific racial, social, and cultural underpinnings. Isbell addresses the racial implications of the two terms: "In Chuschi, Indians define themselves as comuneros. Mestizos call themselves vecinos, but the comuneros call mestizos *qalas*, or 'naked ones.'"¹⁵ Thus, indigenous peasants used the Quechua word "*qala*," which also means "stripped" or "peeled," and which has a racial connotation, referring to anyone who appeared phenotypically non-indigenous, whose indigenous features had been "stripped" or "peeled" from their physical bodies. As Isbell notes, though, "Wealth is another criterion for vecino

¹² Méndez, *The Plebeian Republic*; Heilman, *Before the Shining Path*; Del Pino, "Looking to the Government."

¹³ See La Serna, *The Corner of the Living*.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Isbell, *To Defend Ourselves*, 70.

membership,”¹⁶ meaning that the term also had a clear class element, denoting non-peasants. But the social and racial opposition of the two groups also had strong cultural undertones. On one extreme were “the comuneros, or communal members of the village, who participate in the prestige hierarchy of the *varayoqs* [customary indigenous authorities], wear traditional dress, and speak Quechua,” and on the other extreme of the cultural spectrum were the *qalas*, “who are Spanish speaking, western dressed, foreign nonparticipants in communal life.”¹⁷ Most *qalas* claimed residency in or near the community, and the physical location of their homes further distinguished them from *comuneros*: “Vecinos, without exception, live on or near the village plaza, where all things foreign are located—the municipal and district governmental offices, the stores, the schools, and the church... In contrast, the comunero’s residence in one of the two barrios determines his affiliation with the dual prestige hierarchy.”¹⁸ Isbell maintains that the most important cultural characteristic of a *qala* was “the negation of membership in the commune with all the attendant obligations,” writing that, “Obligatory positions are not held; reciprocal aid is not utilized, but rather laborers are paid with cash. In short, vecinos do not define themselves as Chuschinos, nor do comuneros so define them[.]”¹⁹

Orin Starn criticizes Isbell for her insistence on the inward orientation of indigenous Chuschinos and their binary opposition to the village’s *mestizos*. Isbell, Starn argues, “devoted most of *To Defend Ourselves* to Chuschi’s comuneros. The town’s large mestizo population appears only in the brief passages that mark them as evil foils to the peasant... Isbell’s use of the ‘natives’... encompassed only the comuneros. Peasants became the only real Andeans in Chuschi.” Challenging scholars to avoid the pitfalls of “Andeanism,” Starn argues for “an understanding of modern Andean identities as dynamic, syncretic, and sometimes ambiguous.” Starn finds Isbell’s unwillingness to recognize this aspect of Chuschino consciousness particularly unsettling, for it inhibited her from

¹⁶ Ibid., 72.

¹⁷ Ibid., 68.

¹⁸ Ibid., 71.

¹⁹ Ibid., 73.

recognizing the correspondences between local *comuneros* and *mestizo* “outsiders” that made the Shining Path rebellion possible.²⁰

Drawing from detailed archival and ethnographic research in Ayacucho, this long-term historical study of power relations in pre-insurgency Chuschi recognizes the merits of both arguments. On the one hand, Isbell’s assertion that indigenous and *mestizo* Chuschinós often butt heads is entirely accurate. In fact, one of the reasons that indigenous villagers initially supported Shining Path was to redress this local authority crisis.²¹ On the other hand, Starn is correct in downplaying the binary opposition of *mestizo* and indigenous Chuschinós. Far from being mutually exclusive, the two groups depended on one another. This interdependence was more than economic, although economic factors were important. *Vecinos*’ local hegemony hinged on indigenous Chuschinós’ recognition of their legitimacy. Conversely, indigenous peasants were willing to concede to the *mestizos*’ local dominion provided that they met culturally-and morally-informed standards for non-indigenous power holders.

Rather than discuss each of Chuschi’s *mestizo* leaders, this essay will focus on the two individuals introduced in the opening pages of this essay: Humberto Ascarza Borda and Ernesto Jaime Miranda. Humberto Ascarza accepted his first public office in Chuschi 1932 and continued to work his way up the village’s political hierarchy for years to come. Although other *mestizos* held prominent positions in Chuschi’s political hierarchy, none of them challenged Ascarza’s hegemony during this early period. It was not until the 1950s that a young Ernesto Jaime sought to replace Ascarza as Chuschi’s undisputed patriarch. Why did Jaime challenge Ascarza’s authority at this time? The obvious reason is that the rising notable saw an opportunity. Ascarza’s days as a young Civil Guardsman were well behind him and he could not last forever as Chuschi’s local strongman. The younger Jaime had little to lose by staking an early claim to the local patriarchy. However, there was another reason for Jaime’s challenge, and it had to do with indigenous peasants’ notions of legitimacy.

²⁰ Starn, “Missing the Revolution,” 64-5, 69-70.

²¹ Nor was this the only time that Andean peasants turned to armed insurgency to redress local authority crises. See, for example, Thomson, *We Alone Will Rule*; Serulnikov, *Subverting Colonial Authority*.

By the time Jaime entered the political scene, Ascarza had already broken his power pact with the local populace on numerous occasions and was showing no signs of ever mending it. This rendered Ascarza an illegitimate patriarch in the eyes of local *comuneros*, prompting them to search for a new candidate to replace him as Chuschi's top patriarch. They found that replacement in Ernesto Jaime, an up-and-coming power holder who still adhered to his power pact with the *comuneros* and met their cultural demands regarding authority, security, and public order. In order to get a better idea of why Jaime was so respected by Chuschinos, however, we must first understand why Ascarza was not.

The Dictator of the Consejo

Few *qala* authorities were as despised by *comuneros* as Humberto Ascarza Borda. Despite his granddaughter's insistence that Azcarza was a native Chuschino, the *mestizo's* birthplace is unclear. When asked to state his place of origin during legal proceedings, Ascarza claimed that he was a "*natural y vecino* [native and resident]" of Chuschi.²² The earliest records indicate that Ascarza was a member of the Battalion of the South's Fourth Company in Puno, where he received his license as an officer of the Health Corps in 1931.²³ What is certain is that by the following year, Ascarza had already inserted himself into Chuschi's political hierarchy, taking a three-year term as Governor.²⁴ He resumed the post in 1937 and continued to hold it until 1945, when he took over as Justice of the Peace.²⁵ Ascarza finally reached the top of the political hierarchy when he accepted the title of Mayor in 1950, a post that he would retain for the next four years.²⁶ By

²² Ascarza consistently stated this when called to testify in legal matters. See, for example, ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, "Instrucción contra Humberto Ascarza y otros por el delito de peculado," Manifestación de Humberto Ascarza (11 November 1953).

²³ ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, Certificado de cumplimiento del Guardia Humberto Ascarza (15 May 1931).

²⁴ ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, Nombramiento de Gobernador de Chuschi (22 January 1932).

²⁵ ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, Resolución sobre el reemplazo del Gobernador de Chuschi (17 August 1937); Nombramiento del Juez de Paz de Chuschi (29 December 1944).

²⁶ ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, Copia del nombramiento del Alcalde de Chuschi (14 December 1954).

then, many Chuschinos were already complaining that Ascarza had created a “a dictatorship in the Consejo [Town Council].”²⁷

Ascarza’s political reign was riddled with controversy. On 14 February 1944, forty-four villagers writing on behalf of their illiterate neighbors penned a letter to the Subprefect objecting to a recent request by Ascarza and other *mestizo* officials to graze their livestock on the communal lands of Totorapampa, a couple of kilometers outside of the village. The lands, they argued, “have existed since time immemorial so that the region’s indigenous *comuneros*, without exception, can graze their animals, solely and exclusively, during the harvest season,” adding, “This ancient custom has always been respected due to the immediate action of the... *varayos* [sic] *de campo*, who... impose sanctions on free grazers.”²⁸ The petitioners informed the Subprefect that some *mestizos* had already begun grazing their animals on the plot, destroying barley, potato, and broad bean crops in the process. Whereas in the past the *varayoqs*, the customary indigenous authorities, had succeeded in quelling such problems, the petitioners admitted that this time around “the intervention of the *varayos* [sic] *de campo* has been ineffective, why, the measures they have taken haven’t been respected at all, having been met instead with sarcastic reprisals from those people.”²⁹ In making such a claim, the petitioners implied that the *varayoqs*, who had previously served as a moral and symbolic check against the power of the *mestizo* elite, had lost their ability to thwart the latter’s abuses.

For the indigenous petitioners, the actions undertaken by the *mestizos* compromised the community’s public order. “The purpose of the present petition,” they explained, “is wholesome and honorable... As such, the only thing it pursues is the reestablishment of a custom that benefits the community, whose members must live in the most perfect harmony and strict communion of interests, as a single man, or better yet, a single family, as always, eliminating all motives of possible discrepancies or

²⁷ ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, Denuncia ante el Prefecto contra el Alcalde de Chuschi (20 August 1953).

²⁸ ARA, SC, Caja 15, Of. Chuschi 1944, Carta al Subprefecto sobre conflicto de tierras (14 February 1944).

²⁹ Ibid.

disagreements.”³⁰ Obviously, this highly performative language served a specific purpose, perhaps playing more to state discourses on indigeneity than actual experiences on the ground. Such statements should not be dismissed as mere rhetoric, however. While indigenous communities such as Chuschi were far from harmonious, the above passage represented an *ideal* situation, an expectation that customary authority and justice would somehow curtail *mestizo* abuses and therefore enforce public order within the community. To the indigenous petitioners, these traditional mechanisms had failed them.

This was only the beginning of Ascarza’s problems with the local populace. After nearly three decades of silence, an indigenous peasant named Justiniano Dueñas stepped forward with a confession against his former employer. He claimed that around 1947, his sister-in-law had left him in charge of her property in Chuschi while she was away. While living there, Dueñas worked for a little over two years as Ascarza’s serf, “having never received compensation in kind or in money [*con medio o centavo*].”³¹ While grazing Ascarza’s animals in the site of Totora around 1949, one of the mules escaped. Dueñas searched for the animal all around Chuschi, but could not find it. When Ascarza learned of the incident, he ordered Dueñas to “travel long distances in search of said animal.”³² Edilberto Llalli, another of Ascarza’s serfs, accompanied Dueñas on his expedition. Llalli remembered that he and Dueñas had traveled for days on end without so much as stopping to eat, for fear of Ascarza’s reprisals. They finally found the mule in La Mar Province. Llalli recalled, “During all of our travels on foot in search of the Mule, [Ascarza] didn’t compensate [us] with as much as a kernel of corn, let alone money.”³³ Yet even after finding the mule, Ascarza continued to mistreat Dueñas. The former serf explained: “The abusive Humberto Ascarza Borda, using the pretext of the lost mule, evicted [me] and kicked [me] cleanly out of [my sister-in-law’s] home without even remunerating [me] for my two years’ service, and he even

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ APETT, Of. Chuschi, Declaración de Justiniano Dueñas sobre el hallazgo de una mula perteneciente al Sr. Humberto Ascarza Borda (3 April 1975).

³² Ibid.

³³ APETT, Of. Chuschi, Declaración de Edilberto Llalli Quispe (Circa 3 April 1975).

expropriated all the land of my sister-in-law doña Fernandez, who had left me in charge of the *chacras* [plots] of Poruchuco, Sallachacra and Solar along with the house.” Due to “all the abuses that don Humberto submitted me to,” Dueñas decided to leave Chuschi in search of better living elsewhere. Without going into further detail, Dueñas added, “It’s Humberto Ascarza’s fault that my wife is now immobile [and] invalid.”³⁴ Apolinaria Fernandez herself later testified as much, noting that Ascarza had employed “all the traits of *Casicazgo* [sic] and *Gamonalismo*” in his actions against her family.³⁵

This is the first case I found in which Chuschinós described Ascarza as a *gamonal*. The term has evolved over time, connoting everything from “*hacendado*” to “local strongman.”³⁶ According to Deborah Poole, the term derives from the word *gamón*, which refers to an Andean weed that feeds off of weaker plants.³⁷ Most commonly, scholars use the term to refer to a whole class of *mestizo* power holders—priests, lawyers, local office holders—whose dominion derived from their (1) influence over the political and juridical realm, (2) control over economic resources, and, as a result of these first two factors, (3) ability to exploit and abuse indigenous highlanders with impunity.³⁸ To these criteria we might add a fourth: adherence to Andean cultural demands. It is in this sense that Ascarza met Chuschinós’ criteria for a *gamonal*, for in addition to his economic and political power and abuses, he failed to recognize peasants’ moral expectation of reciprocity.

Reciprocity was only one component of the local power pact; another involved his leadership skills. After completing two consecutive mayoral terms, Ascarza sought reelection in 1954. His *mestizo* godson, Manuel Dueñas, also sought gubernatorial reelection. Upon learning this, eighty-one heads of household joined with the district’s *mestizo* authorities

³⁴ APETT, Of. Chuschi, Declaración de Justiniano Dueñas sobre el hallazgo de una mula perteneciente al Sr. Humberto Ascarza Borda (3 April 1975).

³⁵ APETT, Of. Chuschi, Denuncia de María Apolinaria Fernández ante el Defensor de Oficio de la Oficina de defensa communal de Cangallo (25 June 1975). *Cacicazgo* and *Gamonalismo* refer to the abusive dominion of regional strongmen known as *Caciques* and *Gamonaes*.

³⁶ Heilman, *Before the Shining Path*, 28.

³⁷ Poole, “Landscapes of Power,” 372.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 372-374; De la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos*, 78-84; Mayer, *Ugly Stories*, 88-90; Heilman, *Before the Shining Path*, 28.

in drafting a letter to the departmental Prefect objecting to their candidacy on several grounds.³⁹ For starters, they maintained, the two were incompetent when it came to leading communal works projects. To be sure, Ascarza had exhibited “personal sacrifice” by volunteering to participate in some of the state-initiated projects to improve the local infrastructure, but villagers interpreted the official’s decision to work *pro bono* as a complete “waste of energy,” for the projects never materialized.⁴⁰ As far as the plaintiffs were concerned, Ascarza and his godson “haven’t left behind a single functional public works project in all the years they have held the offices that they now seek to reoccupy.” This lack of leadership left *comuneros* vulnerable, bordering on the “inhumane.” A case in point was the *mestizos’* mishandling of the effort to replace the wicker bridge that connected Chuschi and Quispillaccta. Romualda Galindo escaped with minor injuries after she stumbled on the withered bridge. Leoncio Tucno was not so fortunate. In December 1953, he died while attempting to cross the Chuschi River on a flimsy pole. Had Ascarza and his godson delivered on their promise to repair the bridge, the petitioners insisted, such tragedies could have been avoided.⁴¹ To the indigenous peasantry, then, Ascarza had failed in his most important paternalistic duty: to keep villagers out of harm’s way.

It was under these circumstances that villagers turned to the thirty-five-year-old *mestizo* Governor Ernesto Jaime for help in bringing down Ascarza. Together, Jaime and his *comunero* allies brought multiple embezzlement charges against the Mayor. In particular, the plaintiffs wanted to know what had happened to the balance of 4,405 soles that the Mayor had inherited from the Consejo. Jaime and his allies charged that the former Mayor had intentionally mishandled yet another public works project with the purpose of appropriating the surplus for personal use. In 1952 Ascarza initiated a project to pump potable drinking water into the village. He had contracted a mason named Ambrosio Estrada for the job, which entailed the instillation of three cement pipes designed to pump

³⁹ AGN, MI, PA 1954, Petición de los vecinos de Chuschi al Prefecto (3 April 1954).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

water into the village from a spring a couple of blocks away. The job was ill-conceived from the beginning, they maintained, noting that the “incompetent” Estrada was “brute and imperfect when utilizing the cement, stirring the cement mass with a round wooden reed or *vara*, as if such hideous conduct would make the water run.”⁴² According to the plaintiffs, only two of the three pipes ever worked, and even they only worked for about twenty days before giving out permanently. The plaintiffs suspected that Ascarza had deliberately botched the job as part of an elaborate ploy to appropriate money from the community surplus. Ascarza’s critics were certain that such a makeshift job could not have possibly cost the more than 4,000 soles that the Mayor claimed he had spent on it. Nevertheless, he still found it necessary to borrow an additional 500 soles from the local *cofradía* (religious brotherhood) “under the pretext that he needed [it to purchase] food for the mason who constructed the aqueducts for the potable [water] job.”⁴³

The supplicants suspected that this was not the first time Azcarza had embezzled communal funds. The Mayor had recently taken municipal monies for a land dispute between the community of Chuschi and the neighboring Del Solar family estate.⁴⁴ Even after taking money from the municipal account and pocketing the 600 soles fine that Emilio Del Solar paid the community after losing the legal battle, Ascarza proposed to appropriate the communal lands of Totora as collateral for his protagonism in the community’s legal battle. When the *comuneros* rejected his proposition, he decided to usurp the communal lands of Chillihua—a potato pasture of about thirty village blocks long and twenty wide—as compensation for the 700 soles that he believed the community still owed him.⁴⁵

⁴² ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, Denuncio al Juez Instructor contra el ex-Alcalde de Chuschi (28 June 1954); Denuncia ante el Prefecto contra el Alcalde de Chuschi (20 August 1953).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ For more on this land conflict, see La Serna, “Los huérfanos de la Justicia.”

⁴⁵ ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, Manifestación de Ernesto Jaime Miranda (11 November 1953); Denuncio al Juez Instructor contra el ex-Alcalde de Chuschi (28 June 1954); Denuncia ante el Prefecto contra el Alcalde de Chuschi (20 August 1953).

According to his accusers, Ascarza took more than just money from the community. He also required *comuneros* from four separate neighborhoods to donate one sheep per week “to feed the mason” during the nine weeks that he worked on the water project. They calculated that the mason could not possibly have consumed more than one sheep per week, which left upwards of eighteen sheep unaccounted for. The plaintiffs suspected that Ascarza had claimed the sheep for himself, just as he had done with the dozen bags of cement that were leftover from the project, which he used instead to pave his own house.⁴⁶ And when he was not busy helping himself, he was providing gifts to his family and friends at the community’s expense. For example, Chuschinos periodically auctioned off a portion of animals to augment the communal reserves. Yet as Ernesto Jaime testified, in November of 1952 the Mayor broke with “custom” and sold the animals for personal profit. It was right about this time, Jaime added, when Ascarza’s godson Manuel Dueñas curiously added a mare to his personal litter; the Mayor, for his part, added several horses and cattle to his own. That same year, Ascarza sold Dueñas and wife Romualda Chipana territories where other *comuneros* had been grazing their cattle “since time immemorial.”⁴⁷ According to Jaime and company, Dueñas was not the only one of Ascarza’s relatives to benefit from his tenure as Mayor. Years earlier, former Mayor Nemesio Retamoso had donated land to the Fiscal Boy’s School of Chuschi. Upon becoming Mayor, Humberto allowed his sister Irene to lay claim to a portion of the school property.⁴⁸

Ascarza’s accusers also denounced him for imposing arbitrary taxes on villagers for basic administrative services. For instance, he charged villagers five to ten soles to: expedite birth and marriage certificates in the Civil Registry; hold wedding ceremonies; and obtain licenses for civil posts. He even went as far as to charge *mayordomos* fees of up to ten soles for the right to host ritual celebrations in the community. Such “municipal taxes”

⁴⁶ ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, Denuncia ante el Prefecto contra el Alcalde de Chuschi (20 August 1953); Manifestación de Ernesto Jaime Miranda (11 November 1953).

⁴⁷ ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, Manifestación de Ernesto Jaime Miranda (11 November 1953).

⁴⁸ ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, Denuncia ante el Prefecto contra el Alcalde de Chuschi (20 August 1953).

were not only arbitrary and illegal, they charged, but they also went directly into the Mayor's pocket.⁴⁹

Embedded in the multiple charges of fraud was the accusation that Ascarza had mistreated Chuschi's indigenous *varayoqs*. "In Chuschi there are about twenty [*varayoqs* dedicated] to public service," Jaime and his collaborators explained. "The accused, making use of his inauguration as Mayor, made them serve him personally [through:] domestic service in his house, agricultural labor on his *chacras*, and running errands as far away as the city of Ayacucho and other places, without so much as giving them enough to eat, [instead giving them] just a little bit of *coca* [leaf]." ⁵⁰ Ascarza, they added later, had the *varayoqs* serving him "free of charge, for his [personal] benefit...day and night." ⁵¹ Once again, the theme of reciprocity emerges, as the plaintiffs stressed Ascarza failure to compensate the *varayoqs* through food, coca leaves, or cash.

Ascarza understood that his legitimacy as a *mestizo* power holder hinged on his adherence to Andean codes of reciprocity. In the criminal investigation that followed, he devoted a good deal of energy into defending his reputation as a reciprocator. He explained that each May, during the Fiesta de la Cruz (Fiesta of the Cross), Chuschinós elected ten bachelors to serve the community as *varayoqs*. Their jobs included assisting the Consejo, inspecting communal pastures, and cleaning irrigation ditches. As compensation for their service, the Consejo furnished the *varayoqs* with coca leaves. Ascarza admitted that from time to time he had put these *varayoqs* to work in his own fields. However, he swore that he always paid them no less than fifty cents and up to two soles per day, in addition to feeding them and giving them coca leaves.⁵²

Several acting and former *varayoqs* also stepped forward to testify on Ascarza's behalf. Chuschi's chief *varayoq*, Elías Minas Huaycha,

⁴⁹ ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, Denuncio al Juez Instructor contra el ex-Alcalde de Chuschi (28 June 1954); Denuncio ante el Prefecto contra el Alcalde de Chuschi (20 August 1953); Manifestación de Ernesto Jaime Miranda (11 November 1953).

⁵⁰ ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, Denuncio al Juez Instructor contra el ex-Alcalde de Chuschi (28 June 1954).

⁵¹ ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. N. 1173, Exp. 838, Denuncio ante el Prefecto contra el Alcalde de Chuschi (20 August 1953).

⁵² Ibid.

confirmed that his indigenous authorities had worked in the Mayor's fields once a year, "in accordance to custom," but that they received fifty cents per day in addition to food and coca leaves.⁵³ Thirty-year-old peasant Juan Quispe Cusihuamán also testified that he and the other *varayoqs* were "all under the command of the Mayor Humberto Ascarza" and that "in addition to their service in public works, they also provided personal service on the Mayor's *chacras* or as muleteers [between Chuschi and] the city of Ayacucho and sometimes in carrying firewood to his house." Quispe added that the Mayor compensated the *varayoqs* for their services, however, offering them fifty cents for their work in the fields and a couple of soles for trips to Ayacucho, in addition to food.⁵⁴ These indigenous authorities implied that although Humberto Ascarza obliged them to work for him, he did so by respecting the reciprocal pact between indigenous and non-indigenous authorities.

It is tempting to take the *varayoq* witnesses at their word. However, reading on to the end of Quispe's declaration, we discover that the illiterate farmer placed his fingerprint on the document only after it was "read [to him] by don *Humberto Ascarza*, who served as a witness [to his oral testimony]." ⁵⁵ Yes, Quispe's declaration was presided over by the very person who stood accused of abusing him and his fellow *varayoqs*! Taken together with a statement later issued by Jaime to the judge charging that Ascarza's friends and relatives had "threatened to take vengeance on anyone who declared the truth against the accused, that they would prosecute each and every one of them and seize their goods [and] put them in jail," ⁵⁶ the *varayoqs*' testimonies lose credibility.

As far as the villagers were concerned, Ascarza's behavior smacked of *gamonalismo*. On New Year's Eve 1953, twenty-nine *mestizos* and *comuneros* drafted a petition to the Cangallo Subprefect in which they iterated the implications of Ascarza's actions: "As is natural and human, the

⁵³ ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, Manifestación de Elías Minas Huaycha (12 November 1953).

⁵⁴ ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, Manifestación de Juan Quispe Cusihuamán (13 November 1953).

⁵⁵ Ibid. Emphasis added.

⁵⁶ ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, Petición de Ernesto Jaime al Sr. Juez Instructor (28 October 1954).

accused Mayor, has used his preponderant influences as town *Alcalde* [Mayor] and *Gamonal* against the unhappy Indians, victims of his extortion, who in fear of the accused haven't had the liberty of action to express the truth about the facts, [instead being forced to] hide and warp the truth.⁵⁷ The phrase "natural and human" was not intended to exonerate the *mestizo*, but rather condemn him. The level of exploitation and abuse Ascarza exhibited was not typical of an ideal Andean patriarch, but it was "natural" for a *gamonal*, which in their view was exactly what he had become.

The court delivered its verdict on 3 September 1955, some two years after Chuschi's *vecinos* and *comuneros* had determined in an open assembly to bring multiple charges against the strongman. The court ruled to absolve Humberto Ascarza of the charges of embezzlement, abuse of authority, and *contra la libertad individual* (against individual liberties).⁵⁸ After two years of litigation, Chuschi's "dictator" and *gamonal* was a free man; free, some believed, to continue consolidating his local power at the expense of the indigenous peasantry. Rulings such as this one persuaded indigenous peasants that the Peruvian penal system, like the customary system headed by the *varayoqs*, was ineffective in bringing *mestizo* officials to justice.⁵⁹

Apparently, Ascarza's legal scare did not deter his political ambitions. After seizing executive power in 1968, the Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces established additional administrative positions at the local level. This included the communal President, for which Ernesto Jaime was elected. According to village council records, Jaime was discharged in 1975 for being "considered a suspicious element within the community."⁶⁰ While the document did not detail what he had done specifically to merit this accusation, the fact that Humberto Ascarza,

⁵⁷ ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, Denuncia ante el Subprefecto contra Humberto Ascarza (31 December 1953).

⁵⁸ ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1173, Exp. 838, Sentencia en la acusación contra Humberto Ascarza Borda (3 September 1955).

⁵⁹ This was not the only case in which villagers lost trials against Ascarza despite overwhelming evidence. See, for example, ARA, CC Cangallo, Leg. 1176, Exp. 67, Instrucción contra el Alcalde de Chuschi por el delito de abuso de autoridad i usurpación, Petición al Prefecto (13 April 1955).

⁶⁰ APETT, Exp. Chuschi, Copia de Acta de la Asamblea Extraordinaria de Chuschi (3 April 1976).

now in his seventies, replaced Jaime as President may explain Jaime's sudden removal. Given the long-standing power struggle between Jaime and Ascarza, and given Ascarza's tenuous political record, it would not be unreasonable to suspect that Ascarza had a hand in ousting his rival from public office. The complaint filed by election official Julio Silvestre later that year certainly suggests that such tactics were not beneath the *mestizo* patriarch. At the time, Chuschino candidates ran for local office on Blue or Red party tickets. On 21 November 1976, Silvestre refused to sign village council records recognizing his Blue party's concession of the election, charging that Ascarza had ordered voters to vote only for his Red party.⁶¹ Whether or not Ascarza had actually compelled indigenous Chuschinos to vote for his candidates, the fact that he still held public office in 1976, nearly forty-five years after winning his first nomination in Chuschi, demonstrates the extent of his authority within the community. Even if Silvestre's accusation was false, it still served as a public reminder of the tactics *mestizo* leaders like Ascarza could employ to secure their local dominion.

Simply put, Ascarza's treatment of his indigenous constituents violated peasants' moral expectations. Not only did his arbitrary taxes and refusal to compensate his servants' for their labor violate peasants' moral economy, but they also undermined peasants' cultural mores. For example, Ascarza's taxes on marriage ceremonies and ritual celebrations convinced some indigenous villagers that he did not respect their cultural autonomy. Moreover, his conduct undermined their paternalistic sensibilities, as he appeared more concerned with consolidating the political and economic capital of himself and his *mestizo* cronies than in safeguarding communal interests. This was to say nothing of Ascarza's perceived incompetence as a leader. As we have seen, some held him personally responsible for the injury and death of peasants who had tried to cross the withered bridge that he had failed to fix. In this way, Ascarza had failed in his most important paternalistic duty of protecting villagers. Nor was Ascarza the only *mestizo* authority who neglected the inherent cultural demands that indigenous

⁶¹ APETT, Exp. Chuschi, Copia de Acta de Asamblea Extraordinaria de Chuschi (14 December 1976).

Chuschinos made of him. On the contrary, Humberto Ascarza's contentious relationship with the indigenous peasantry is emblematic of a larger crisis of local authority in mid-twentieth-century Chuschi.⁶² Only one man stands out in both the archival record and collective memory as a *mestizo* authority who resisted this historical trend. That man was Ernesto Jaime.

Without a doubt, political opportunism played an important role in the alliance between Ernesto Jaime and the indigenous peasantry. For Jaime, the prospect of replacing Ascarza as Chuschi's ultimate patriarch must have been quite enticing, and he probably understood that he would need *comunero* support if he were to succeed in replacing the elder authority. Likewise, indigenous peasants probably understood that would need a powerful *mestizo* ally if they were to have any chance of halting Ascarza's abuses. Yet, the power relationship between indigenous Chuschinos and Ernesto Jaime was more than just a political alliance. The reason Chuschinos chose Jaime as their main ally over other *mestizo* notables was that time and again Jaime had demonstrated his adherence to the power pact. For indigenous Chuschinos, culture was just as important as politics.

The Man on the Golden Horse

Unlike Humberto Ascarza, *comuneros* were willing to vouch for Ernesto Jaime. Returning to the 1954 petition in which eighty-one indigenous *comuneros* denounced Ascarza before the departmental Prefect, we find that the document included a staunch defense of Governor Jaime against Ascarza's counter-attacks.⁶³ The petition opened with a statement of gratitude to the Prefect "for having entrusted the political Administration of this district of Chuschi to don Ernesto Jaime Miranda; an authority who strictly completes his duties and whose relations with the indigenous race, who in their [sic] great mass make up almost all of the inhabitants of the district, are immemorial." The petitioners went as far as to remind the Prefect that this marked the first time indigenous Chuschinos had ever solicited his office in *defense* of a local official. The reason, they explained,

⁶² See La Serna, *The Corner of the Living*, ch. 3.

⁶³ AGN, MI, PA 1954, Petición de los vecinos de Chuschi al Prefecto (3 April 1954).

was that “this is also the first time that an authority has earned the affection, respect, and gratitude of our people, for his zagacity [sic] and austere conduct.”⁶⁴

The Chuschino petitioners went on to compare Azcarza and Jaime’s service records. Whereas Ascarza’s personal ambitions and general incompetence had failed Chuschinos time and time again, Ernesto Jaime had proven himself an able *mestizo* authority. During his first stint as Governor from 1944 to 1946, he oversaw the successful construction of the village Boys School. The structure, they added, was “first class.” Jaime had also supervised the completion of the two-story administrative center and local prison. And while Ascarza had botched the construction of the bridge between Chuschi and Quispillaccta, Jaime had secured wire cables for the bridge covering the Pampas River. Jaime had also overseen the conversion of the local soccer field into a sort of stadium and delivered on his promise to improve local roads. The petitioners reassured the Prefect that they had the “unanimous sentiment of the people of Chuschi, who know how to assess the benefits they’ve received and demonstrate their appreciation for a benevolent and laborious authority like señor Jaime.” The supplicants closed with a request that the Prefect recognize “the permanency of don Ernesto Jaime Miranda in his position of Governor of Chuschi” and disregard the “malicious intervention” of Ascarza and his allies.⁶⁵

Indigenous Chuschinos would hold Jaime in high esteem for years to come. Jaime had passed away shortly before I began my field research in 2007, but his legacy lived on in villagers’ collective memory. Ignacio Huaycha, one of the first indigenous *comuneros* to break the race barrier by becoming an elementary school teacher in the 1970s, spoke affectionately of the late-*mestizo* leader. According to *profe* (professor) Ignacio, Jaime “wasn’t like the other [*mestizo* authorities]... People loved him... He didn’t just lead for himself, but rather he led like an authority should. He had a clear understanding [of how an authority should lead], much more than the other [*mestizo* authorities]... People respected him.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Interview with Ignacio Huaycha, Chuschi (27 July 2007).

Just what had Jaime done to earn villagers' respect? In addition to the qualities outlined in the above petition, many believed that he was more sensitive to customary institutions and practices than other *mestizo* leaders. *Profe Ignacio* gave an example of this: "When he was an authority he never failed to give the [*varayoqs*] a single lantern, which was customarily given to them [so that they could patrol the fields at night]." ⁶⁷ This gesture illustrated Jaime's understanding of, and respect for, the policing function of the indigenous authorities. At the same time, it highlighted his respect for cultural codes of reciprocity, as evidenced in his commitment to furnishing them with the supplies necessary to perform their public service.

Additionally, Jaime prioritized collective over private interests. Although I found no documentary evidence to support this claim, several Chuschinos told us that Jaime had even divorced his *mestiza* wife as a gesture of his commitment to the *comuneros*. Jaime's wife, it turns out, was the daughter of the landowners with whom the Chuschinos had been involved in a heated territorial conflict. ⁶⁸ According to local legend, Jaime left his wife in an act of solidarity. *Profe Ignacio* summed up this opinion:

Just when we started having [land] conflicts [with the Del Solar family], he left his wife. 'Maybe he's on their side,' people started saying, 'maybe this *verno* [in-law] is going to Ayacucho and telling them all of our business.' So he said, 'What do I have to do to . . . convince people that I'm a Chuschino?' So he got divorced. He sided with the village. . . . He sure was a good authority. ⁶⁹

Comuneros preferred not to speculate as to whether Jaime's affair with his indigenous servant, María Cabana, had anything to do with the divorce. At the time, though, Jaime's wife went into a jealous rage, vowing to catch Cabana off guard in the middle of the night and kill her. So imminent was the *mestiza's* threat that in June 1966 Cabana fled Chuschi for the provincial capital and asked to be voluntarily placed in custody until the Subprefect could guarantee her safety. ⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Chuschinos in 2007 chose to ignore this circumstantial evidence and focus instead on how

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ For more on this conflict, see La Serna, "Los huérfanos de la justicia."

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ ARA, SC, Solicitud de garantías de María Cabana Allcca ante el Subprefecto (17 June 1966).

Jaime's divorce and subsequent marriage to yet another indigenous servant further demonstrated his faithfulness to the community. No matter what the real reason was for Jaime's divorce, Chuschinos walked away from it convinced that Jaime had placed communal over private interests.

More importantly, Jaime had proved willing and able to "protect" his constituents against outside aggression. A former soldier in the Peruvian army, Jaime had the military skills to do so, as Profe Ignacio explained: "He was a [soldier] in the war with Ecuador in 1941, and when he returned to Chuschi around that time he began training some of the local youths." This military training came in handy during a bloody inter-community battle between Chuschi and Quispillaccta in 1960.⁷¹ Although the *quispillacctino* authors of the text I read during my first trip to Chuschi believed that both of Chuschi's *mestizo* patriarchs had led the assault on Quispillaccta, the documentary and oral record suggest that it was Jaime, not Ascarza, who spearheaded this attack. But this was not a top-down effort, as *comuneros* fully expected their *mestizo* leader to defend the community. Early on 16 April 1960, community members gathered in the very administrative building that Jaime had helped build and elected him and a handful of other local authorities to top administrative positions. The results of the ad-hoc election were met with applause and "lively voice[s] of satisfaction," signaling that the "the integrity of our town" had been placed in good hands. Over 100 heads of household signed or made their mark on the corresponding minutes.⁷² While we cannot rule out the possibility of coercion, these records imply that indigenous *comuneros* expected their *mestizo* authorities to lead in the communal defense effort.

That is exactly what Jaime did. Mounted on his golden horse with revolver in hand, the *mestizo* leader illustrated his willingness to put his life on the line and personally defend Chuschi's territorial integrity.⁷³ Jaime's military leadership during the pitched battles against the Quispillacctinos cemented popular opinion about his legitimacy as a non-indigenous authority. Chuschinos would remember Jaime's role in the communal

⁷¹ For a more detailed account of this inter-community feud, see La Serna, "To Cross the River of Blood."

⁷² ARA, CSJ-JP Cangallo, Sin Leg., Exp. 687, Acta de la Comunidad de Chuschi para la defensa de la integridad territorial (16 April 1960).

⁷³ La Serna, "To Cross the River of Blood," 121-21.

defense for years to come. Profe Ignacio Huaycha did not need for me to bring up the battle to start talking about Jaime's role in it: "He led the Chuschino cavalry," he said fondly. When I asked Profe Ignacio if Jaime had enjoyed the *comuneros'* support, he nodded. "That's why he did it. Because we needed his military expertise. Because you can't just cede your [communal] lands to other people."⁷⁴

This "defense" of the community did not necessarily have to be achieved militarily; it also could be exhibited through legal channels. An example came in 1968 when a local fourth-grader named Herminio Tucno drowned during a class fieldtrip to a regional swimming pool. *Comuneros* held the *mestizo* teacher, Moisés Olivares, personally responsible for the death of the indigenous boy. Now Mayor, Jaime led the charge, urging the boy's parents to bring criminal litigation against Olivares for negligence. Jaime's leadership in the case prompted a verbal spat between the two *galas* in the municipal office. Jaime told the presiding judge that Olivares stormed in and began yelling "at the top of his lungs [*a voz en cuello*]," declaring that "any day now he would eliminate me."⁷⁵ Olivares did not deny that the confrontation took place, saying only that Jaime had exaggerated his actions. If anything, Olivares clarified, it was the Mayor who had neglected to pay him the respect due a college graduate.⁷⁶ The fact that the indigenous villagers, including the boy's parents, held the *mestizo* teacher responsible for the death of their child, rather than dismissing it as an unfortunate accident, indicates that they expected *mestizo* notables to protect the indigenous children under their care. That Jaime took action against Olivares further illustrated his commitment to protecting his indigenous constituency.

Ernesto Jaime's amicable relationship with *comuneros* demonstrates the importance of the power pact between *mestizo* and indigenous Chuschinos. By divorcing his *mestiza* wife and eventually remarrying an indigenous woman; protecting his villagers militarily; initiating legal action against abusive and negligent *mestizos*; respecting

⁷⁴ Interview with Ignacio Huaycha, Chuschi (27 July 2007).

⁷⁵ ARA, CSJ-JP Cangallo, Leg. 45, Exp. 142, Denuncia de Ernesto Jaime Miranda contra Moisés Olivares Ascarza (2 November 1968).

⁷⁶ ARA, CSJ-JP Cangallo, Leg. 45, Exp. 142, Preventiva de Moisés Olivares Ascarza (2 November 1968).

customary institutions and practices; and exhibiting competent leadership with respect to communal works projects, Ernesto Jaime demonstrated his legitimacy as an Andean patriarch.

The distinction that indigenous *chuschinos* made between Humberto Ascarza and Ernesto Jaime speaks to the local contours of Andean power relations. Race and class alone were not enough to place a *mestizo* notable in opposition to the indigenous peasantry. Take *chuschinos'* notion of *gamonalismo*. Humberto Ascarza fit the bill of a prototypical *gamonal*; Ernesto Jaime did not. Culturally speaking, Ernesto Jaime had a lot more in common with *comuneros* than did Ascarza because he exhibited an understanding of Andean cultural values vis-à-vis race and class. Unlike Ascarza and other Chuschino notables, Jaime recognized that his local power hinged on his compliance with Andean notions of reciprocity, security, and justice. Because of this, Chuschinos viewed Jaime not as an abusive *gamonal*, but as a legitimate patriarch. Understanding this distinction is crucial to explaining Chuschi's political trajectory during the years of political violence that followed.

The Shining Path in Chuschi

Throughout the civil war, Shining Path leaders reminded Chuschinos of their pledge to eradicate *gamonales* from the village. Given their frustration with men like Humberto Ascarza, who was just one of an increasing number of *mestizo* officials who broke their end of the power pact in the years preceding the armed conflict, it comes as no surprise that indigenous *comuneros* were willing to submit abusive *mestizos* to Shining Path's justice.⁷⁷ This is particularly important if we consider the type of justice that the rebels carried out during the initial phase of political violence. Rather than killing their victims, as they later did with great frequency, Shining Path rebels initially punished abusive authorities by stripping them naked, flogging them in front of the entire village, and casting them out of the community.

⁷⁷ For more examples of abusive *mestizo* power holders who were brought to justice during the Shining Path years, see La Serna, *The Corner of the Living*.

This explains why indigenous Chuschinós supported the insurgency. To them, the armed conflict was as much about bringing abusive patriarchs to justice as it was about ideology and class. Whereas Shining Path *leaders* emphasized class conflict, *comuneros* saw the insurgency as an opportunity to turn the illegitimate power hierarchy on its head. By stripping *mestizo* authorities naked in front of all the villagers, the rebels were essentially stripping them of their principle status markers—their urban dress—thus rendering them symbolically equal to the indigenous poor. By flogging the *mestizo* notables, the oppressed became the oppressor. This act also illustrated that the *mestizos'* fair skin could crack and bleed just like an Indian's—that theirs, to borrow Diane M. Nelson's shrewd phrasing, were "bodies that splatter."⁷⁸ The public expulsion of the *mestizo* power holders from the community represented the final act of *comuneros* recapturing their political autonomy. Because this was the principle objective of these tribunals for indigenous Chuschinós, they saw no need to insist on killing the *mestizos* during the initial phase of violence—the objective was not genocide, but rather the re-equilibration of a broken power pact.

This also explains why not all *mestizo* power holders fell victim to Shining Path justice during the initial phase of political violence. Rather than punish all *mestizos*, indigenous peasants focused on the individuals whom they believed had violated the power pact. This was a major reason why Ernesto Jaime escaped public castigation and expulsion during the first two years of violence. Because Jaime had respected the power pact, Chuschinós elected not to submit his name as one of the many *mestizo* authorities to be tried in the PCP-SL's popular trials. In fact, Chuschinós continued to defer to Jaime's political authority even after the insurgents took control of the community. Fulgencio,⁷⁹ a Chuschino adolescent who had joined the ranks of the Shining Path during this period, confessed that he and his Chuschino comrades had invited Ernesto Jaime to participate in the meetings of the PCP-SL's local *comité popular* (popular committee). The reason for this, Fulgencio explained, was that he and his comrades valued Jaime's judgment and leadership when it came to administering

⁷⁸ Nelson, *A Finger in the Wound*, ch. 6.

⁷⁹ This is a pseudonym.

justice against local deviants: “He would also help us make decisions in the popular committee, [saying:] ‘This is what we should do, *jóvenes* [youngsters].’”⁸⁰ That local subversives allowed Jaime to participate in their meetings should come as no surprise given *comuneros*’ historical deference to Jaime’s authority and judgment. Many villagers saw Jaime as one of the community’s few legitimate *mestizo* authorities—flawed, to be sure, but generally respectful of the power pact.

As the civil war waged on, however, the PCP-SL grew intolerant of local opinion. By late-1982, most abusive authorities had either been punished or driven out of town by the rebels. Notwithstanding this public purging, the PCP-SL demanded more victims and began escalating its use of violence in peasant communities. The reason for this is twofold. First, the Maoist leadership saw itself as engaged in a “prolonged people’s war” that would only triumph through the continued renewal of violence. Just because local communities had been rid of abusers and deviants did not mean that the PCP-SL had satisfied its steep “blood quota”; the party demanded more victims.⁸¹ Second, and in part because of this first factor, peasants in some communities began taking up arms against the insurgents in early 1983. The rise of these peasant counterinsurgency militias, or *rondas campesinas*, ushered in a new era of indiscriminate violence on the part of the rebels, who now viewed anyone who did not offer them unflinching support as a potential enemy.⁸²

This was the context in which non-Chuschino guerrillas started turning on some of the community’s most respected villagers. One of those villagers was Ernesto Jaime, who sometime in 1983 was put on popular trial. Unlike the *mestizo* authorities before him, it appears that Jaime had not been denounced by his fellow villagers. Instead, it a group of rebels—none of them from native Chuschinos—brought Jaime to trial of their own volition. Without bringing forward any evidence to support their ruling, the insurgents found Jaime guilty of *gamonalismo* and submitted him to a series of whiplashes as punishment. The Maoists probably figured that the

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Gorriti, *The Shining Path*, 98-106.

⁸² For more on the rise of the *rondas campesinas*, see, for example, Fumerton, *From Victims to Heroes*; Degregori, et al., *Las rondas campesinas*; Starn, “Villagers at Arms,” La Serna, *The Corner of the Living*.

comuneros would support their decision. Jaime was, after all, a *mestizo* notable with significant power vis-à-vis the local populace. The guerrillas could not have been more mistaken. To the *comuneros*, Jaime's punishment represented a rupture in the accord between them and the rebels. Without cause, the rebels had attacked a *legitimate* Andean patriarch and in so doing surrendered their own legitimacy as local arbiters of justice. This act was just one of several in which Shining Path guerrillas violated Chuschinos' cultural mores.⁸³

So ended the brief accord between Chuschinos and the PCP-SL. Almost immediately, villagers—Fulgencio included—cut all ties with the guerrillas. Fulgencio and other Chuschino insurgents held clandestine meetings with other “legitimate” authorities and village elders to determine their next course of action. There, it was decided that the Chuschino Senderistas would desert the guerrilla army. Fulgencio was one of several local youths to do so, seeking out a new civilian life in Ayacucho City, where he remains to this day.⁸⁴ That same year, peasants from Chuschi solicited the presence of state counterinsurgency forces to help expel Shining Path from the village once and for all.⁸⁵

The Shining Path's political fate in Chuschi reveals a good deal about the group's successes and failures in the Ayacuchan countryside. While the rebels' efforts to expel abusive power holders earned them early sympathy in some communities, their narrow view of Andean power relationships ended up costing them the very support base they sought to build. Focusing exclusively on class conflict and political authority, Shining Path failed to account for the cultural common ground that peasants and notables sometimes reached. At the same time, Shining Path incorrectly conflated *mestizo* power in the countryside with *gamonalismo*. Yet as the Chuschi case illustrates, indigenous peasants did not view all *mestizo* notables as *gamonales* whose power needed to be subverted. The rebels ignored these realities even when they stared them in the face. Instead of learning why their Chuschino comrades would invite a *mestizo* authority

⁸³ See La Serna, *The Corner of the Living*, chapter 5; Isbell, “Shining Path and Peasant Responses.”

⁸⁴ Interview with *Fulgencio Makta*, Ayacucho City (31 July 2007).

⁸⁵ Isbell, “Shining Path and Peasant Responses,” 87.

like Ernesto Jaime to their rebel meetings, or why villagers chose not to submit him to their popular trials, the guerrillas dubbed him a *gamonal* and brought him to trial anyways. Shining Path's unwillingness to understand the complexities of local power relationships ultimately contributed to the group's demise.

* * *

Ernesto Jaime's compliance with the Andean power pact ended up saving his life. Not only did he survive the worst of the political violence, but also remained a prominent figure in the village until his death in the early 21st-century. But whatever became of his rival Humberto Ascarza? Did the radicals submit him to the same type of public humiliation as his *mestizo* neighbors? Did they expel him from the community, or worse, kill him? No. Notwithstanding his long history of antagonism with indigenous Chuschinos, Ascarza managed to escape Shining Path sanctions. The explanation that Chuschinos gave for this is telling, as it underscores a core *comunero* value regarding age.

Fulgencio and the other local Senderistas were well aware of Ascarza's record. "Ah, Humberto Ascarza. . ." Fulgencio reflected when I raised the subject. "My parents told me he was a guy who ruled the town and that he was a guy whom people had to obey." By the time the insurgency broke out in Chuschi, however, Ascarza was well into his 80s. Fulgencio could not justify submitting an elder to such harsh treatment: "I, for one, could see that he was already a señor of advanced age who barely had enough energy to get by. I thought he was basically like any other elder who had done some [bad] things in the past." Fulgencio's neighbors agreed, for they never submitted Ascarza to the Senderistas to be tried for his past crimes. As an elder—even one who had once been abusive—Ascarza deserved to be left alone.

Of course, solitude was not necessarily a good thing for an old patriarch like Ascarza. As Alberto listened to Fulgencio describe Ascarza's fate, he reminded his neighbor that the old man got what he deserved in the end. Because the rebels had run most of the other *mestizos* out of town—including Ascarza's own family—the elder patriarch was left to fend for

himself throughout the remainder of the insurgency, having ruptured all ties with the indigenous peasantry:

He lived all alone, *todo viejito* ['very old'], and didn't have anyone to take care of him. He [was all alone] in his huge house... but eventually his children sold it and he was left with just a *chozita* [a little hut]... and every day he'd have to go *todo viejito* to work on his *chacra*, all alone... It was pathetic. He didn't have any food or anything, and that's how he lived. And I tell you, even his own wife wouldn't come back to him... and his children abandoned him, *pucha mare!* ['son of a gun!']... And the villagers just treated him like he was anyone else. They no longer respected him because things had changed quite a bit... Now the power was in the hands of the children of *comuneros*... and the [*mestizos*] were finished.⁸⁶

Normally quiet and reserved, Alberto became full of life as he wrapped up his soliloquy: "One day, [Ascarza] told me, 'Alberto, I've got some *cuyes* [guinea pigs], let's go eat them.' 'Sure, why not? Let's go eat *cuy*,' I said. And when we got [to Ascarza's hut], there was nothing there but rats! The *viejito* didn't realize [he had been eating rats]! He had been killing rats and eating them, having mistaken them for *cuyes*. . . . *Ese viejito murió comiendo rata* ['That old man spent his dying days eating rats']!"⁸⁷ Alberto's animated account of Humberto Ascarza's demise strikes at the heart of what the PCP-SL rebellion represented to *comuneros*. Just as important as political ideology, indigenous peasants saw the insurgency as an opportunity to address a local crisis of legitimacy.⁸⁸ This way, even when *mestizos* eluded Shining Path justice, they still could not escape social justice, forced, as was Ascarza, to experience a life without privilege. For many Chuschinós, this was punishment enough.

Conclusion

Foucault reminds us that where there is power there is resistance.⁸⁹ Chuschi's mid-twentieth century history verifies this, as indigenous peasants relentlessly contested the abuses of Humberto Ascarza and other *mestizo* authorities. At the same time, we might add to Foucault's thesis that where there is power there is also submission, acceptance, and

⁸⁶ Field notes, Ayacucho City (31 July 2007).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ I borrow this notion from Thomson, *We Alone Will Rule*.

⁸⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol.1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990 [1978]), 95.

approval. The amicable relationship between *comuneros* and Ernesto Jaime offers a fitting example. To be sure, indigenous-*mestizo* relations in pre-insurgency Chuschi were power-laden; at times they were even conflictive. How these relationships played out and shaped indigenous peasant consciousness over time depended on the degree to which individual power holders lived up to their end of the power pact, however. It is in understanding the localized nuances of power relationships that we can comprehend peasant support for Shining Path.

To be sure, this is not the first study to suggest that peasants used armed struggle as an opportunity to bring abusive power holders to justice.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, this essay makes three contributions to the existing literature. First, in pulling back the historical clock some forty years before the ILA, I join Jaymie Patricia Heilman's recent effort to contextualize the political violence within a larger historical trajectory.⁹¹ Second, my work underscores the role that cultural factors played in peasants' decisions to support the insurgents. While most studies of Shining Path justice focus on the political corruption and abuses of *mestizo* authorities, this study shows that the social and cultural infractions of these local power holders figured just as heavily in peasants' political calculations. But as we have seen, not all local power holders violated peasants' cultural mores. This brings us to our final contribution. In emphasizing that villagers did not submit all *mestizo* authorities to Shining Path justice, this essay serves as a caution against narratives that cast power relations as naturally and universally antagonistic. Instead, scholars would do well to consider the extent to which conflictive *and* amicable power relationships shape historical processes.

⁹⁰ See, for example, Degregori, "Harvesting Storms," 132; Heilman, *Before the Shining Path*, 159-60; Isbell, "Shining Path and Peasant Responses," 86; Manrique, "La década de la violencia" 157-58.

⁹¹ Heilman, *Before the Shining Path*.

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