

A **Contra** corriente

Una revista de estudios latinoamericanos

Vol. 15, Num. 3 (Spring 2018): 290-292

Reseña / Review

Serulnikov, Sergio. *Revolution in the Andes: The Age of Túpac Amaru*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013.

Túpac Amaru's Revolutionary Politics

David Klasse

New York University

Sergio Serulnikov has given us something very valuable in his book *Revolution in the Andes: The Age of Túpac Amaru*; he has provided an impressive introduction to a period of revolutionary mobilization in the southern Andes that succeeds in summarizing the key events of a complex and multifaceted age while making key interventions into how the movement unfolded. He fits this broad treatment into a mere 159 pages—including glossary, references, and index. The author manages this synthesis while also exploring movements in geographical regions beyond those where the rebel leader Túpac Amaru operated. He also extends his analysis beyond the execution of the rebel *cacique*—underlining how the uprising was more than just the work of a single discontented leader or community. Packing so much in threatens to ignore major facets of the moment, but Serulnikov masterfully manages to balance

efficient summary with an acknowledgment of where more in-depth analysis is needed. His work is a valuable lesson in how brevity does not have to lead to oversimplification.

In the introduction, the book provides important insights that provide the reader with critical foundational concepts as to how to approach the period. Throughout the book, Serulnikov elucidates the previous and ongoing politics of Indian communities in the area should be taken seriously as a critical element in the emergence of the revolution. As obvious as that point may seem, it is, sadly, a necessary argument to repeat given how the indigenous population of the region is regularly treated as merely reactive or as the instrumentalized tools in the political machinations of elite actors. Prior historical analyses, including his own previous research, inform Serulnikov's argument that indigenous patterns of landholding, conceptions of reciprocity, and negotiations of colonial institutions played a crucial role in the outbreak of insurgency as traditional expectations broke down. Instead, even though it eventually faltered, the revolution cast a long shadow over the following decades by terrifying loyalists and inspiring other indigenous rebels which significantly changed how colonial administration and economy functioned in those vital final years of Spanish rule in the Americas.

Serulnikov does not shy away from examining the violence of the revolution, its defeat, and its subsequent repression as integral elements of the story. The colonial system relied upon the use of violence to enforce its control, and the pushback against these forces was itself very bloody and included long sieges of both Cuzco and La Paz. Sanitizing a process that romanticizes resistance or simplifies the story would do a disservice to our understanding of the moment. Rather than excusing or ignoring the violence, Serulnikov puts it into cultural, religious, and political context noting, for example, how the process of the rebellion radicalized the participating indigenous population. The depth of violence is important because the cataclysmic loss of life during the struggle had significant effects upon Andean society and the colonial economy. Also, memories of the violence of the period reshaped how people thought through political possibilities for decades after the revolution.

Of course, a study of this length cannot be comprehensive. There are many clear questions that Serulnikov leaves underexplored. How did Catholicism, priests, and Andean religious practices affect the rebellion? What was the effect on the larger rebellion of intra-indigenous conflict: between different language groups, between rival claims to Inkan authority, between different sectors of the community, between localities with different experiences of the colonial apparatus? However, even when

answers to these questions appear underdeveloped or missing, Serulnikov regularly points to pivotal works that can help the reader research these problems further.

This excellent introduction to the revolutionary period appears at an important time. Serulnikov's writing encourages those of us who hope that the renewed historical interest that will accompany 2021's bicentennial of Peruvian independence will include more sustained inquiry into the revolutionary politics of the preceding decades. As Serulnikov makes clear, the culture and politics of Andean communities did not die—with the execution of Túpac Amaru and his family—nor did the revolution stand as a straightforward harbinger of the later republican independence. Instead, even though it eventually faltered, the revolution cast a long shadow over the following decades not only by terrifying loyalists who remembered the radicalism and inspiration of the indigenous rebels who recalled the power of the mobilization, but also by significantly changing how colonial administration and economy functioned in those vital final years of Spanish rule in the Americas.