Of Legends and Lack: The Economy of *Criollo* Discourse in the *Historia de la Villa Imperial de Potosí*

Unlike the chimerical city of El Dorado, the legendary fame of the silver-mining city of Potosí was based on the reality of its riches. Located in the colonial region of Upper Peru, present-day Bolivia, the *Cerro Rico* of Potosí yielded over 220 tons of refined silver per year, and at one point accounted for one-fourth of the Spanish Crown’s revenue.  

By the early seventeenth century, Potosí’s status as a source of immeasurable wealth had made its way into Spanish literary production. Yet at the same time that Potosí appears in the *Quijote* as a city capable of satiating even Sancho Panza’s appetite for riches, its silver production had already begun a steady decline. While Potosí was still an important source of silver, it no longer enjoyed its former wealth, and was surpassed in terms of silver production by the mining cities of New Spain: Zacatecas and Guanajuato. Potosí’s silver production had fallen from a staggering 890,000 marks in 1592, to a mere 200,000 in 1705, and the accompanying crisis of poverty and decreased population transformed the city into a shadow of its former self.

It is within this context of legend and lack that Bartolomé Arzáns de Orsúa y Vela began composing his monumental narrative, *Historia de la Villa Imperial de Potosí*. It consists of 330 chapters that follow a yearly organization, and offer details about virtually every aspect of the city’s life. Arzáns wrote the *Historia* between 1705 and 1736, and like other clandestine texts of its kind, it had to be safeguarded due, in part, to the critiques leveled against important members of society and against royal officials. In this sense, the *Historia* resonates with such varied narratives as Juan Rodríguez Freile’s *El carnero* and Alonso Carrió de la Vandra’s *El lazarillo de ciegos caminantes*, both of which describe the public and private events that took place within urban spaces, often criticizing the established colonial system and commenting on the behavior of the different sectors of society.
Additionally, these clandestine discourses tend to reflect the author’s reaction to specific material realities, including political, social and economic shifts, at the same time that they draw upon classical rhetorical strategies and pre-Enlightenment genres. Despite being one of the few historiographies that have recorded Spanish American viceregal society in such detail, the Historia remained in relative obscurity until the 1965 Brown University publication led by Lewis Hanke and Gunnar Mendoza.

At the time Arzáns writes his Historia, Potosí’s silver production had been in steady decline for well over a century. Even so, the full title of his opus reiterates the city’s legendary greatness: “Historia de la Villa Imperial de Potosí, riquezas incomparables de su famoso Cerro, grandezas de su magnánima población, sus guerras civiles y casos memorables.” A tension between the city’s legendary past and its subsequent material decline surfaces throughout Arzáns’s narrative, a tension that the author attempts to reconcile throughout the more than 1,500 folios that comprise the Historia. The author addresses this decline through the use of Christian rhetoric. Arzáns’s moralistic asides center on human behavior and are founded on the dichotomy between evil and good, sin and redemption. In fact, one of the distinguishing features of this text is its denouncement of a whole range of sins that includes murder, pride, greed, envy and lasciviousness.

This essay examines the relationship between economic crisis and the author’s discourse. I argue that, through his year-by-year account of daily life in Potosí, Arzáns presents the behavior of the city’s inhabitants as directly and unequivocally responsible for Potosí’s fate. Belief in the relationship between the behavior of individuals and the divine favor or wrath bestowed on their community represents a long Judeo-Christian tradition. Yet in the Historia, this divine intervention forms part of an intricate dynamic of moral cause and effect. In what I call here a moral economy, sinful behavior is denounced and pious behavior lauded because of their material effects: mortal sins bring divine punishment in the form of economic ruin, while virtuous behavior is rewarded by God with an increase in the city’s wealth. In other words, the moralistic rhetoric of the Historia goes beyond the simple didactic recounting of moral and immoral behavior; it becomes a discursive strategy that serves to explain the city’s economic crisis. Furthermore, I illustrate that Arzáns’s treatment of Christian morality, which juxtaposes
sins and acts of piety, allows him to exalt the criollos, or American-born Spaniards, of his native Potosí while providing a platform from which to denounce the corrupt practices of certain groups of his contemporaries. This moral economy allows the native of Potosí to exonerate the Villa’s criollos by linking them through the richness of their character to the city’s legendary greatness, while attributing immorality—and by extension the fall of the city—to specific groups of forasteros, that is, outsiders or foreigners. As he narrates the years of greatest decline, Arzáns recounts a long list of sins and denounces all manner of immoral acts committed by Europeans, specifically the chapetones, or newly-arrived Spaniards, of Potosí. The author’s moral digressions, then, reveal a politically charged criollo discourse predicated on very real economic concerns.¹⁴

The first elements of Arzáns’s moral economy are elaborated in terms of a fatherland. While celebrating the Cerro as “[e]l famoso, siempre máximo, riquísimo e inacabable Cerro de Potosí,” Arzáns centers his narrative on the urban space of the Villa Imperial (I: 3).¹⁵ This discursive move away from the Cerro to the city represents a shift from the natural to the political, from the geographical to the cultural. In the very first line of his prologue, Arzáns evokes the idea of patria, which he claims guided his desire to undertake the writing of the Historia. According to the author, the local criollos, or naturales de Potosí, share a strong sense of community and a single desire to see their city memorialized:

[e]l gran deseo que en muchos de mis compatriotas y de otros hombres de varias provincias del orbe avecindados en esta Imperial Villa de Potosí [. . .] he conocido de ver escrita la historia de esta famosa cuanto memorable Villa, me le pudo adelantar en mí, que también estaba con el mismo deseo. (I: clxxxiii)

Arzáns employs the term patria in the classical sense of a shared feeling of belonging to a city. The compatriotas to which he refers are the criollos who were born in Potosí, whom he clearly distinguishes from “otros hombres de varias provincias del orbe avecindados en esta Imperial Villa,” which is to say the foreigners and immigrants who had settled there.¹⁶ The patria to which Arzáns refers is not the expansive geographic area that constituted the Viceroyalty of Peru, or even Upper Peru, but rather the imperial city of his birth and even more specifically, the legendary image of that city as it existed even then in popular imagination.¹⁷
Potosí’s grandeur is represented by Arzáns in wonderfully baroque fashion at the beginning of his narrative; in the very first chapter the Historia announces the Villa’s preeminence in both the Old and the New World:

La muy celebrada, siempre ínclita, augusta, magnánima, noble y rica Villa de Potosí; orbe abreviado; honor y gloria de la América; centro del Perú; emperatriz de las villas y lugares de este Nuevo Mundo; reina de su poderosa provincia; princesa de las indianas poblaciones; señora de los tesoros y caudales; benigna y piadosa madre de ajenos hijos; columna de la caridad; espejo de liberalidad; desempeño de sus católicos monarcas; protectora de pobres; depósito de milagrosos santuarios; ejemplo de veneración al culto divino; a quien los reyes y naciones aPELLIDAN ilustre, pregonan opulenta, admiran valiente, confiesan invicta, aplauden soberana, realzan cariñosa y publican leal; a quien todos desean por refugio, solicitan por provecho, anhelan por gozarla y la gozan por descanso. (I: 3)

As the glorious epicenter of the world, Potosí is likened to royalty (emperatriz, reina, princesa, soberana), and its religious and political devotion are presented as superior and exemplary. Interspersed among these superlatives is a series of terms with economic connotations (rica, desempeño, protectora, opulenta, refugio, provecho), all of which underscore the material basis for the city’s fame and the fiscal relief Potosí has offered the Crown. As Arzáns states, the city is recognized not only as valuable to Spain, but it is also recognized within the context of the world’s economy as other nations proclaim its magnificence and all people seek to profit from its riches.

Arzáns’s representation of the Cerro as “el famoso, siempre máximo, riquísimo e inacabable Cerro de Potosí,” is based on its reputation as a source of interminable wealth (I: 3). His use of the present tense emphasizes its continued opulence, as does his repeated use of “siempre” when asserting Potosí’s eternal greatness. This was not, however, the case. Peter Bakewell’s study of Potosí’s silver production delineates three distinct stages of output, the last of which spanned from 1594 to 1735 and corresponded to the economic and civil crisis that resulted from severely declining production. It is during this period that Arzáns writes his Historia. His reference to the Cerro as an unending source of silver and his simultaneous acknowledgement of the economic decline that was affecting his city create a discursive
tension that highlights his need to perpetuate the legend of the city while somehow explaining its decline.

These tensions are readily seen when Arzán’s bemoans the city’s decline, frequently doing so in the form of exclamations: “¡Oh, cuánta grandeza (nos refieren varios historiadores) mantuvo esta Villa en los pasados tiempos, y cuánta desdicha posee al presente!” (II: 156). However, these kinds of laments are often immediately followed by triumphant claims about the city’s continued preeminence: “Grandiosa siempre ha sido, grande es todavía pues mantiene de plata al mundo” (II: 161, my emphasis). The most dramatic of Arzán’s laments do in fact correspond to the chapters that describe life in the Villa post 1620, when Potosí’s silver production takes a significant downturn. For example, in the chapter that corresponds to 1685, Arzán expresses the ultimate disillusionment: “Todo se ha acabado, todo es pena y fatiga, todo llanto y suspiros. Por cierto fue esta una de las notables caídas que han acontecido por las poblaciones del mundo: ver tanta vanidad, tan incomparable riqueza vuelta en polvo y en nada” (II: 322–23). Here Arzán expresses the kind of desencanto and lament for lost riches that some have categorized as typical of the baroque mentality. However, treating the Historia simply as an example of baroque disillusionment ignores the author’s insistence on Potosí’s greatness and the rhetorical complexities of the narrative, as evinced in his repeated claim regarding the city’s perpetual greatness: “sin cesar está dando este gran Cerro su acendrada plata y tiene un infinito que dar;” and again “todavía da Potosí tan grande cantidad anual, todavía reparte la riqueza de su Cerro al orbe” (II: 364; III: 156).

The antithetical juxtaposition of legend and lack often results in Arzán’s shifting the focus away from material wealth and toward a dynamic system of moral cause and effect. In the narrative corresponding to 1686, for instance, Arzán performs a discursive slight of hand that allows him to define the city’s greatness not in terms of silver ore, but rather in terms of the city’s natives:

Finalmente, grandiosa en todo ha sido esta Imperial Villa y su Cerro grande es todavía pues mantiene de su rica plata al orbe; grande es el intelecto, discreción y valor de sus naturales; grande es (vuelvo a decir) su piedad y liberalidad para con todos juntamente con la de todos sus moradores. (II: 333)
The author’s insistence on Potosí’s continued greatness is possible due to the rhetorical shift from the Cerro’s legendary yield of silver ore to the magnificence of the city’s *naturales*, or natives. This lengthy list of *criollo* attributes—discretion, intellect, valor, compassion and generosity—overwhelms the initial reference to Potosí’s silver and shifts the focus onto non-material wealth. The parenthetical reiteration “vuelvo a decir” underscores the insistent nature of the assertion that the city’s actual greatness resides in the exemplary character and intellect of its *naturales*. The category of *moradores*, or inhabitants, is once again clearly distinguished from the natives, and reference to them seems tacked on as an afterthought. The focus here is the *criollos*, *naturales de Potosí*.

The author is quick to point out that those born in his magnificent city naturally inherit Potosí’s greatness in the form of personality and intelligence: “hablando sin pasión alguna y con la verdad que a todos es notorio, [los de Potosí] son de agudos entendimientos y de felices memorias” (II: 333). In fact, the birth of the first *criollo* of Potosí is described by Arzáns as a miraculous event, the grace of which allowed the Villa to prosper: “en más de 40 años de su población no se pudo humanamente lograr un niño español que fuese natural de Potosí, siendo necesario concurrir un milagro para lograrse el primero” (I: 5). The divine intervention that resulted in the birth of Potosí’s first criollo—on Christmas day, no less—had a lasting effect on the city. According to the author, the miracle mitigated the notoriously frigid climate, allowing for the future development of the Villa: “Al presente (atribuyéndolo a superior causa y acto sobrenatural) se experimenta de cielo más benévolo, más apacible clima” (I: 6). In the same manner that the climate is altered by this divine birth, Arzáns suggests that all members of this new population of *naturales* are similarly blessed: “gozando de influjo más favorable sobresalen hermosos rostros, disposiciones gallardas, lucidos ingenios, corazones valientes y generosos ánimos” (I: 6). The author’s emphasis on the climate of Potosí evokes the debates about the adverse effects of the climate and the environment on the Spaniards born in the Indies that were brewing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This early form of geographic and climatic determinism drew upon the theories of classical philosophers like Hippocrates, whose theory of the four humors and the effect of the climate on these bodily fluids were used both to establish and refute the idea that Spaniards born in the Indies were inferior intellectually.
For Arzáns there is a natural and intimate relationship between the exaltation of his native city and the praise of his compatriots. Yet if Potosí’s native criollo population is imbued with general excellence and the city itself deserves to occupy a position of historical prominence, what would explain its decline? The stark economic problems that surrounded Arzáns as he wrote his *Historia* threatened to destroy the city of his birth and to render preposterous his baroque exaltations of its legendary abundance. Arzáns formulates his response to the city’s economic crisis by establishing an opposition between insiders and outsiders, weaving a narrative in which the superior behavior and character of the criollos, or peruanos de Potosí (whom he considers to be its true naturales), are overwhelmed by the sinful and criminal actions of the men he calls forasteros. The author’s stated purpose, to rescue the legend of his city’s riches from the “sordo riesgo del olvido,” is inextricably linked to his attempt to explain the city’s economic decline (I: clxxxiii). To this end, he places the blame for all the city’s ills squarely on the hordes of forasteros that assailed Potosí daily, and whose avarice, ambition, and lasciviousness, are blamed for bringing God’s wrath upon the city in the form of economic ruin.

The heterogeneous and ever-changing sector of forasteros proved to be the most difficult segment of Potosí’s population to categorize, as is evident in the few surviving census records. It is clear from contemporary documents that many different groups contributed to the constant ebb and flow of migration to the city, including Muslims, Italians, Northern Europeans, people of mixed race and blacks both free and enslaved. Although Indians and Spaniards accounted for the vast majority of the population, Arzáns at times disregards the distinctions between these groups by categorizing them all simply as forasteros, occasionally indicating their place of origin using, for example, “forasteros peruanos” when referring to criollos who are not natives of Potosí. At the beginning of his narrative, he underscores the unstable character of forasteros as a group: “en cuanto a moradores no se puede poner en guarismo permanente porque se experimenta que los forasteros (así de los reinos de España y de las Indias) entran unos y salen otros al año, o dos o tres de su entrada” (I: 9–10). Yet the difficulties posed by this itinerant group go far beyond logistical concerns. As the city matures and the population of forasteros becomes more varied, Arzáns explains how the city’s abundant riches, the very source of Potosí’s fame, give
rise to unrest and chaos: “[c]on suma infelicidad gozaba Potosí de sus riquezas o por mejor decir penaba por ellas, pues su misma prosperidad le ocasionaba y acarreaba tanta adversidad, porque es claro que si no abundara la plata no acudían por ella tanta variedad de gentes como acudieran a esta Villa, causa de tantas inquietudes” (I: 196). The variegated character of the city’s population serves as a convenient scapegoat for the civil unrest and the chaos that had come to characterize Potosí: “el dejarse de matar unos a otros los de varias naciones en pendencias y encuentros particulares [. . .] siempre se ha continuado en Potosí por ser plaga suya y tan preciso el acoger en su Villa cuantos hijos arroja la mayor parte del mundo” (I: 401). The murders and social chaos that plague the city are thus seen to result from the deleterious influence of immoral foreigners, immigrants that Potosí, owing to her selfless generosity, has accepted into her fold.

Having made these generic references to the immorality of foreigners, Arzán goes on to specify a series of sins that he attributes to them, including greed, envy, lasciviousness, and pride. Arzán illustrates these sins through digressions and anecdotes about individual acts of opportunism, corruption, murder, and adultery, and concludes that these acts are responsible for invoking God’s wrath in the form of plagues, natural disasters, wars, and even the unfavorable royal inspections, all of which directly or indirectly affect the city’s economic well-being.

When Arzán describes the secular celebrations that took place after the Villa celebrated “el día de Corpus a lo divino con el mayor culto, veneración y grandeza,” he paints the picture of foreigners gaping at and coveting the rich costumes and jewels that the criollos of Potosí donned for their six days of festivities (I: 268):

Asimismo los gallardos criollos hicieron seis máscaras, las dos de día y las cuatro que lucieron de noche, con tantos gastos, riqueza y vistosas invenciones, tantas galas, joyas, preciosas perlas y piedras de sumo valor, que dieron mucho que mirar y mucho más que notar a los forasteros, que con nueva codicia encendió los deseos que en algunos había de las riquezas de Potosí, procurando después con sus inquietudes alborotar la Villa por gozarlas mediante el robo y la violencia. (I: 268)

The mere sight of such opulence inflames the covetousness of these foreigners who then wreak both civil and economic havoc, as they stir up all manner of unrest (inquietudes) in order to secure these riches through
violence and theft. Again, these outsiders stand in stark contrast to the *naturales* of the city, not only because of the difference between *criollo* wealth (*galas, joyas, preciosas perlas, piedras de sumo valor*) and the implied poverty of the foreigners, but also in terms of their morality.

Even though writers and moralists of the time claimed that, where luxury abounds, “fortunes and manners are changed and empires are undone,” Arzáns does not denounce luxury or displays of excessive riches. To the contrary, the opulence of the Corpus festivities are associated with the *gallardía*, the gallantry, excellence, and valor of Potosí’s *criollos*, and it is couched in terms of strict morality and spiritual propriety since the divine festivities were given primacy and were observed with the utmost reverence. Arzáns faults, instead, the greed and envy of the *forasteros* who provoke turmoil and conflict in their attempts to illegally appropriate the *criollos*’ goods. Thus the dual nature of the city’s wealth is shown: in the hands of the pious native *criollos* it serves to further the glory of God, while the base and ignoble foreigners who have come searching for easy fortunes are incited by these same riches to acts of violence and thievery. Not only does this besmirch the reputation of the Villa, it also disrupts the sanctioned flow of silver and regulated exchange of goods, undermining the very conditions that drew the foreigners to the city in the first place.

Despite boasting of Potosí’s ability to receive the sons from all other nations, Arzáns defines this multitude as a force of negative influences and blames them for the adversity that marked Potosí’s history. The 1558 chapter is entitled “Irritada la divina justicia con los pecados de los habitadores de Potosí les quitó la riqueza a sus metales. El conflicto en que por esto se vio el reino, con otros sucesos” (I: 108). In rationalizing the degradation of the quality of the Cerro’s silver ore, Arzáns explains that the inhabitants (note he does not use the term *naturales*) of Potosí had irritated divine justice, forcing God to retaliate by removing the high quality “plata blanca” from its veins.
no bastando tantas lástimas, tanto derramamiento de sangre, y muer-
tes en los pasados alzamientos, tiranías y bandos, cuotidianamente se
despedazaban unas con otras las naciones y no se hartaban de derramar
sangre, movidos o ya de la codicia y ambición (que por tener más se
quitaban unos a otros la plata con pretextos frívolos) o ya de la pasión
de sus naciones y patrias. (I: 109)

The quality—and hence the value—of the ore is directly affected by the
sins of those men who are motivated by greed, avarice, and ambition.

Because it is included among the preceding list of reprehensible motivations, pasión evokes the idea of soberbia, or the sin of pride. Perhaps the clearest example of the regional passions that led to the civil and economic disruption in the Villa is the war between the “vicuñas” and the “vascongados,” or Basques, which lasted from 1622 until 1625, and which Arzáns describes in the lengthy chapters that correspond to those years. According to Bakewell, this civil war had its roots in the long-standing hostilities among regional groups in the Peninsula. Basques, “who by virtue of ancient legal privileges, possession of a different language, and a long history of distinct, if not separate, development in Spain, tended to cluster together in what others often considered an exclusive and disdainful way” (Silver and Entrepreneurship 26). The pasión de patria y nación to which Arzáns refers, then, is based on the kind of ethnic identification that predated nineteenth-century nationalism, but that is nonetheless profoundly rooted in a shared regional, linguistic, and cultural identification.31 The Basques were pitted against the “vicuñas,” who generally consisted of non-Basque Spaniards and criollos. However, such alliances were transitory by nature, and Arzáns’s description of these wars does reflect to some extent the provisional alliances that surfaced and were broken throughout the four years of unrest.32 The wars begin, according to him, as a result of the pride and arrogance of foreigners, since in Potosí “todos pretenden cuantos a ella vienen (aunque sean extranjeros) el mandarla o tener los mejores puestos” and “cada cual quería mandar la gente absolutamente” (I: 328; I: 333). The personal ambition of these foreigners drives them to demand positions of power in a land not their own, while their haughtiness and unbridled ambition lead them to acquire these posts through homicide; these crimes lead in turn to social chaos, giving rise to all kinds of other criminal behavior that further contributes to Potosí’s economic crisis.
Although Arzáns insists throughout these chapters that the war was “castigo de la ira de Dios” for the many sins that abounded during the time, his concerns are not strictly moralistic (I: 352). There were very real economic repercussions as a result of this war, as many inhabitants left the city “con todas sus riquezas” and a greater number of foreigners descended upon Potosí to take advantage of the social chaos and the multiple opportunities it afforded for thievery and other crimes. Describing the second year of this war, Arzáns explains:

Todo el mes de marzo se pasó en muertes, heridas, pendencias y robos considerables, porque era así que la gente vil y forastera que a la noticia de estos alborotos habían venido a esta Villa, robaban casas enteras y hacían otras gravísimas maldades, de suerte que desde principios de enero hasta marzo de este año [. . .] pasaron de 300,000 pesos los que sólo en moneda saquearon de particulares vecinos. (I: 54)

In addition to this type of pilfering, the city’s economy was affected because mining came to a halt as the azogueros were preoccupied with hiding their “riquezas, plata, joyas y alhajas preciosas” in various convents in order to safeguard them from foreign bandits as well as from their local rivals (I: 54).

According to Arzáns, Potosí’s wealth was “atractivo para la concurrencia de tanta multitud de gente de varias partes del mundo, ocasionando la diversidad de naturales, alborotos, pendencias, muertes, heridas y otras graves ofensas contra la divina majestad” (II: 15). These words introduce what, according to the author, constituted one of the major scourges on the life of the city: the debasement of Potosí’s coinage in 1652.

For more than a decade the coins minted in the Villa had been adulterated by the inclusion of excessive amounts of copper. The presidente who was sent to the city to rectify this situation was forced to devalue Potosí’s coinage, and this debasement had immediate and devastating economic repercussions for the Villa. Arzáns explains that because of the coexistence of so many people from various parts of the world, and owing to the resulting violence and grave offenses against God, “envió Dios aquella plaga del presidente, y juntamente que habiendo hecho la rebaja en la moneda comenzaron en su tiempo a descaecer gran parte de estas minas” (II: 135). Although Arzáns is familiar with the administrative corruption and the improper minting practices that prevailed before the “plaga del presidente,” he does not denounce
them in this instance. Instead, he maintains that the coexistence of so many different nations and the immoral behavior of its inhabitants brought divine punishment in the form of minting reforms that, in turn, contributed to the city’s economic crisis.

At times, his comments regarding the Villa’s decline are manifested in terms of a lament about the brevity and the deception inherent in the things of this world. While describing the problems of 1692, for example, a time when there was great debate as to whether or not the mita system of forced Indian labor should be abolished, Arzáns expresses this kind of tragic sentiment when he laments the drop in the number of Indians who worked the mines: “de 5,000 indios que venían al entero de la dicha mita hoy apenas vienen 700, que todas la cosas del mundo caminan con disminución y paran en nada” (II: 64). Yet the author’s treatment of all things temporal as “nada,” or nothing, coexists here with an attempt to explain and even remedy the “disminución” of Potosí’s wealth in more empirical terms, as indicated by his reference to demographic and labor issues. He goes beyond this explanation, though, and denounces the fraudulent economic practices of his contemporaries. This time, when Arzáns repeats his moralistic generalizations about the correlation between sinful behavior and Potosí’s economic slump, he refers to specific acts of corruption: “Rematóse con esto en pobreza esta famosa Villa [. . .] ¡Oh qué gran fatalidad para Potosí, oh qué gran desacierto se hizo pues se le quitaron al rey innumerables quintos, o qué notable descaecimiento para la mayor parte del orbe! Atribuyóse finalmente a castigo que Dios hizo a esta Imperial Villa por sus pecados [. . .]” (II: 364). The perpetrators implicit in the phrase “le quitaron” have all but pilfered the royal coffers by stealing for themselves the silver that should have gone to the Crown in the form of taxes. Since only minted silver could be taxed, this group would have had to remove silver illicitly, bypassing the official minting regulations. Potosí’s decline affects not only the Crown, but the world economy, and the cause is again attributed to sinful behavior.

In a seemingly paradoxical move, Arzáns immediately insists on the city’s continued and eternal wealth while at the same time revealing the causes of its current “pobreza.” The above quote is directly followed by this explanation: “pues desde entonces se experimentan muchos deslustrres, que aunque sin cesar está dando este gran Cerro su acendrada plata y tiene infinito que dar, como no hay indios que
trabajen sus minas se padece al presente grande desventura [. . . ]” (II: 364). The problem seems to be the lack of Indian labor and he offers an anecdote to illustrate one possible cause: an unnamed *azoguero* abuses the Indians under his charge by not paying them, by publicly beating and insulting them, and by demanding that they pay him in silver as well as through their labor in order to turn a profit. Yet the problem is not merely a decline in the number of Indian workers; Arzáns refers to “muchos delustres.” Together, the literal and figurative meanings of the word “deslustre” underscore the kind of corruption that Arzáns denounces here. Literally, *deslustre* means the removal of the luster or shine, and figuratively the word refers to the dishonor or mark caused by an ignoble or unseemly act. In the case of Potosí, it is immorality that tarnishes the city’s image not simply because the Indians are mistreated, but because immorality is associated with the illicit removal of the city’s silver. Morality or lack thereof is discussed in terms of its material economic repercussions for the Villa.

In order to leave no doubt as to the reason for the *deslustre* and the *pecados* that have marked the city, Arzáns concludes the above digression by summarizing the city’s current state of “grande desventura” and explaining that its greatest cause was the behavior of Spaniards: “[. . . ] se padece al presente grande desaventura, aumenándola mucho más el descaro, atrevimiento, deslealtad y traición irremediable de los de España, pues cada año se llevan toda la plata en piñas por Buenos Aires y los demás puertos” (II: 364, my emphasis). Arzáns’s contemporaries would have recognized the mention of Buenos Aires as a reference to the illicit trafficking of silver, since that was one of the primary ways in which untaxed silver was surreptitiously removed from Potosí. Furthermore, Arzáns inculpates “los de España” as the perpetrators of these shameless acts of treachery. What at first seemed a paradox—the continued wealth of an impoverished Potosí—is clarified here: Potosí continues to yield a great quantity of silver, but because of the corruption of the Spanish the Villa has become impoverished. The concrete economic consequences of this thievery, covetousness, greed, and avarice are that the Crown is not paid its royal fifth, unminted silver is allowed to circulate, illicit trade disrupts the world economy, and the reputation of the great city is tarnished.

The number of stories about the scandalous behavior of outsiders increases markedly in the chapters that correspond to the latter half
of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. To describe the earlier years of the city’s life, Arzáns relied heavily on previous historians, but there is consensus that Arzáns’s writing takes on a more journalistic style after 1708, in the sense that the author begins to report on contemporary events as they happen, often including both commentary and critique. Not surprisingly, then, in these chapters he regularly omits the names of specific individuals, offering instead scant clues as to their identity, often times referring solely to their natal origin. At times he states that he has decided to conceal the identity of these individuals out of a sense of “prudence” or for the sake of “convenience.” The reason for this self-censorship seems well founded if we remember Arzáns’s claim that a local judge who had heard rumor of his Historia had attempted to arrest him and destroy the text. Still, it is in his recounting of the Villa’s daily life and his retelling of events that he witnessed during the early eighteenth century, that the digressions and anecdotes about sinful and pious behavior, and hence the author’s discursive moral economy, are fully elaborated.

Arzáns’s early eighteenth-century reporting often depicts sins that are sexual in nature, such as adultery and lasciviousness, sins that he usually attributes to newly-arrived European immigrants. In 1728, the archbishop Luis Francisco Romero traveled to Potosí to conduct a visita, or inspection of the colonial authorities, under the auspices of the Council of the Indies. As Arzáns tells it, upon the archbishop’s arrival he was given a papelón, or clandestine piece of writing, that listed the guilty parties: “2 nombres de sujetos de la Europa que se entretenían en lascivias con mujeres perdidas, y los hizo llamar uno a uno [. . .] entre ellos había hombres viejos y mozos recatados” (III: 283). Though Arzáns avoids naming these “sujetos de la Europa” directly, and he does not stress that visitas typically involved the assessment of royal officials, he perpetuates their shame by recounting that they are exposed before the unsuspecting city: “no sabiendo muchos su fragilidad se hizo público motivando escarnios, befas y burlas” (III: 283). Had these individuals been members of the lower estados, their moral frailty would not have incited such scandal. It is the individuals arriving from Europe and, in this example, those who enjoyed a certain position of privilege (and who were imbued with a concomitant moral responsibility), who give free reign to their sexual appetites and who create such mayhem that a royal inspection is warranted. In sum, their hypocrisy is uncovered, and they become the target of public ridicule.
The category of European foreigner begins to suffer a transformation in the chapters that correspond to the first three decades of the eighteenth century; in those years, the general mention of Europeans is replaced by references to newly-arrived Spaniards. It is worthy of note that within his moral economy Arzáns does not simply oppose criollos to peninsular Spaniards. His own familial and social ties would make this kind of oversimplification impossible. However, he does present certain Spaniards, usually those who had recently-arrived in Potosí, in a way that emphasizes their “foreignness” and underscores their European origin; he often recounts their ignoble acts by referring to the “voz pública,” or the gossip that circulated about them.

In these later chapters, recently-arrived Spaniards (previously referred to as simply la juventud de España), are disparagingly called chapetones, and are portrayed as one of the more degenerate segments of Potosí’s forastero population:

Desde el año antecedente y en particular desde principios de enero de este de 1718 entraron en esta Villa crecido número de chapetones de España en busca (como llaman) de la vida, y como madre universal los acogió ella y les dio sus conveniencias como continuamente lo hace, aunque siempre están quejosos porque cada uno de éstos quisiera un cerro entero de Potosí. (III: 73)

Though these newly-arrived Spaniards who have descended on Potosí in search of riches are well received, their attitude is far from respectful. What stands out is the chapetones’ unmitigated greed even in light of their own poverty and the self-sacrificing generosity of this “madre universal.”

The change in the representation of newly-arrived Spaniards is most dramatically noted after the plague of 1719, from which point onward they are almost always represented as lascivious, avaricious, violent, and frequently associated with women of ill repute: “La juventud de España (que acá llaman chapetones cuando tienen pocos días su llegada) ordinariamente como hallan liviandad en las mujeres perdidas que habitan en esta Villa se adelantan a tanta deshonestidad que no se puede declarar” (III: 80). As Arzáns explains, these chapetones told ciertas mujercillas of the custom of the English courts where the prince is served by naked women, and they decided to recreate that erotic practice. Arzáns relates the ensuing debauchery only to ask pointedly, “Todo
esto ¿cómo no había de irritar a la divina justicia y ejecutar un castigo general?” (III: 80). Once again, the behavior of foreigners contributes to the degradation of Potosí. The author attributes the devastating plague to the *chapetones’* licentious behavior, and specifically to their sin of lust and their association with *mujeres perdidas*.

In another case, the Spaniards’ sin of vanity and greed had disastrous results for the city because, according to Arzáns, the European plague was brought to the Villa Imperial by the importation of clothing by those most closely related to that market: the *chapetones*.45

Greed is not denounced here for purely moral reasons. Instead, the *codicia* of the Spanish is referred to as a monstrosity because it results in exploitative pricing practices. Ultimately, what is at stake in Arzáns’s representation of this immoral behavior is the economic prosperity of Potosí. As he explains, these *chapetones* arrive in Potosí with no funds of their own which places a strain on the city; compounding this problem is the manner in which these men squander the money of others through illicit means.

Arzáns begins his chapter about the Spaniards who arrived in Potosí in 1725 with a rhetorical question emblematic of his moralistic denouncements: “Pero ¿qué podría acarrear la lascivia desenfrenada sino males para todos? En la juventud de España fue este año con tal extrema que destruyó a muchos cargadores, pues hubo quien tuvo ocho cajeros chapetones y todos gastaron en mujeres perdidas lo ajeno” (III: 208). Instead of responsibly guarding the money with which they were entrusted, these *chapetones* prove to be at the mercy of their own lustful desires. Arzáns summarizes the result of this behavior: “[e]llas se quedaban riendo y ellos llorando la pérdida de hacienda y crédito y así venían muchas de éstas [mujeres perdidas] de los contornos [. . .] a la fama de la bobería forastera” (III: 208). The author clarifies that this is not an isolated case. *Chapetones* repeatedly demonstrate their irresponsibility and moral negligence in their dealings with prostitutes and women of ill repute, and these illicit transactions lead to individual losses, both pecuniary and moral.
Arzáns follows this anecdote by expressing his bewilderment about the behavior of these indigent *chapetones*, ending with a digression about free will: “pero es más notable que teniendo cada uno de los mortales su libre albedrío se dejen arrastrar de esta amorosa pasión hasta ponerlos en lo último de su perdición [...] Los deshonestos son brutos con piel de racionales” (III: 209). Arzáns treats these *chapetones* as beasts who only wear the skins of rational men at the same time that he associates them with the other scapegoats, the whores who circulate throughout the city, endangering its economic and social stability.

In stark contrast, Arzáns presents exemplary behavior as the sole dominion of the *criollos* of Potosí. Not only are these *naturales* distinguished from other *criollos*, but they are also set apart from *chapetones* because, by fulfilling their moral obligation of giving alms, they exceed the inhabitants of Spain in terms of the pious manner in which they employ their considerable wealth. The *Historia* is replete with examples of *potosinos* who are noted for their piety and charity: “Limosnas se han dado en Potosí [...] como se vio en aquel caritativo caballero don Juan Fernández, natural de esta magnífica Villa, pues dio de una vez más de 30,000 pesos a aquel pobre andaluz que le pidió una corta limosna” (II: 333). The excellence of character ascribed to *potosinos* is exemplified through anecdotes similar to the one associated with this “caritativo caballero;” his excessive generosity indicates not only his great material wealth, but also the nobility of his deeds.

Digressions about the superior charity of *potosinos* also expose the wayward condition of the hundreds of Spaniards who arrive in Potosí bragging of nobility. As Cynthia Milton has explained, during the colonial period elite Spaniards could petition to be recognized as poor. This category of “pobre de solemnidad” was founded on the idea that elites had the responsibility to maintain a certain lifestyle and to protect their interests because, despite economic hardship, they were still honorable. 46 While this may have been the case for the many poor peninsular Spaniards who populated the city, Arzáns’s depiction of certain impoverished Spaniards draws attention to their less than honorable behavior and their low social standing. For example, *potosino* charity is described not only within the context of Spanish poverty, but in ways that expose the adulterous relationships of certain *chapetones* with members of the lower classes. This characterization of newly arrived Spaniards refutes the claim, whether founded or unproven, that they are members of the nobility.
According to Arzáns, Spanish immigrants who arrived in Potosí almost naked from poverty acquired great wealth, not because of their noble status, but because of the charity of the city’s criollos. He defiantly adds, “sin que me apuren, digo con toda claridad que también han adquirido la soberbia, vanidad y locura del mal uso, propios efectos del que nunca supo qué era grandeza” (II: 158). By describing them as men “who never knew greatness” Arzáns undercuts their alleged nobility and treats them as a degenerate throng of nouveau riches. Conversely, Arzáns argues that precisely because they were born in this viceregal city, los naturales de esta Villa have an intimate relationship with “grandeza,” or greatness, from birth and the charitable and prudent use of their riches distinguishes them from the throng of foreigners who exemplify “[l]os daños que suelen nacer de la demasiada riqueza cuando el uso de ella no es prudente” (II: 453). Again the author underscores the difference between the naturales of Potosí and the chapetones: the former have an intimate relationship to the city’s riches and the latter have neither the moral fiber nor the rational capacity to assimilate the riches offered by the Villa Imperial.

The traditional moralistic rhetoric employed by Arzáns and his representation of Christian thought, specifically of several cardinal sins, serve to address very real material concerns. In the Historia, sins committed by foreigners, like greed, pride, envy and lust, are used to explain the decline of Potosí. The ways in which Arzáns negotiates the city’s legend and its lack, and the manner in which he exonerates or assigns blame to certain groups is discursively strategic. The moral economy at work throughout his narrative explains the fate of Potosí not only in terms of the behavior of natives and foreigners, but also in terms of the opposing behavior of Potosí’s criollos—whose birthright makes them heirs to the city’s riches in every sense—and Europeans, specifically chapetones, who represent external and consequently harmful influences. This use of a moral economy allows Arzáns to redeem the true sons of the Villa, while presenting chapetones as a foreign infestation that degrades the worth of Potosí itself, squanders its riches, and tarnishes the city’s legendary greatness. The role of chapetones and other immoral foreigners within Arzáns’s moral economy, and their treatment by the author as the embodiment of evils responsible for the city’s economic woes creates a discursive space from which he can report the corruption and abuses that he saw. The sinful behavior that Arzáns describes,
far from being a mere example of moralistic rhetoric, has concrete economic ramifications in the city and allows him to denounce the fraudulent and corrupt dealings of those groups he deems detrimental to the fame and well-being of his beloved Potosí.

LAFAYETTE COLLEGE

NOTES

1 Peter Bakewell points out that the height of Potosí's silver production occurred in the sixteenth century, and that in Potosí's peak year it produced 440,000 pounds of refined silver, “equivalent in its value to nearly 44 percent of the total annual expenditures of the Spanish crown in Spain and the rest of Europe in the mid-1590s” (Silver and Entrepreneurship 16).

2 In the Quijote, Sancho Panza complains bitterly about being cheated of his rightful payment for having allowed himself to be ritualistically pinched and poked in order to resurrect the supposedly love-sick Altsidora. Don Quijote replies: “Si yo te hubiera de pagar, Sancho, [...] conforme lo que merece la grandeza y calidad deste remedio [...] las minas de Potosí fueran poco para pagarte” (Cervantes 2:555). Potosí’s legendary fame is referenced in several of Cervantes’s works; for a complete listing, see Howard Mancing’s The Cervantes Encyclopedia, particularly the entries for “Potosí” and “Charcas.”

3 Potosí lost its position as the preeminent producer of silver ore to Zacatecas in 1710 and later to Guanajuato around 170 (Bakewell A History, 231–32).

4 For a yearly chart of silver production and tax rates, see Bakewell’s “Registered Silver Production.” Regarding the debate about the impact of mining on the economies of Europe and the Spanish colonies and the “century of depression’ controversy,” see Richard L. Garner’s “Long-Term Silver Mining,” particularly pages 902–03.

5 The little biographical information we know about the author is gleaned from the Historia and from a few legal documents and a report written by one of his former students. These sources inform us that Arzáns had no formal education, he was born and lived his entire life in Potosí, he had been a teacher, he married a woman from La Plata and had one son named Diego, and that, although he did not want to publish or sell his manuscript, Arzáns did allow certain anecdotes from the Historia to be read in mass for moralistic didactic reasons. The author’s name has been written as Arranz, Arzay, Arana, and Arsina, and these discrepancies have been attributed to either the author’s whimsy or the simple inaccuracy of copyists. In either case, questions about his name remain unanswered to date. For a detailed discussion about the different names employed by Arzáns, see Hanke (I: xxxiii–xxxiv) and García Pabón (Espacio Andino 58–61).
After his unexpected death in 1736, Arzáns’s son, Diego, writes the chapters that correspond to the years 1736 and 1737; I treat only Arzáns’s narrative.

The clandestine nature of the Historia is understandable given that mere rumors of the critiques leveled by the author against certain members of his society led to violent reactions among his contemporaries. As Arzáns explains, when a particular judge heard that the Historia denounced his uncharitable treatment of the poor, he decided to take punitive measures, and Arzáns barely managed to escape with his manuscript. When the judge’s men arrived at his house to arrest him, the author recounts: “escondí todos mis escritos llevándolos para más seguridad fuera de mi casa y también zafando mi persona” (II: 21).

Like the Historia, El carnero combined all manner of scandalous anecdotes and social critiques with more traditional historical forms and rhetoric. Part of the subversive nature of this text and of El lazarillo is their appropriation and manipulation of European historiographic traditions or Enlightenment philosophy, and the manner in which these discourses were fashioned to reflect the immediacy of the author’s criticism and his personal ideology.

In her incisive study, Hierarchy, Commerce, and Fraud in Bourbon Spanish America, Ruth Hill argues that El lazarillo de ciegos caminantes must be read in light of material history in order to fully understand the semantic variegation, or heterogeneity, at play in the text. She goes on to trace the various classical influences that surface in El lazarillo in terms of both form and content. See in particular chapter seven, entitled “Trial of the Century: Humor, Rhetoric, and the Law.”

The two extant manuscripts, which are believed to be copies of an as yet lost original, are housed in the John Carter Brown Library and the Biblioteca de Palacio in Madrid. For a detailed explanation of the circulation and fate of the manuscripts, see Hanke and Mendoza.

Hanke and Mendoza attribute the Historia’s religious tone to the heavily cited Corónica moralizada by Fray Antonio de la Calancha. Similarly, Leonardo García Pabón ascribes Arzáns’s “visión trágica” to the textual sources that he employs (García Pabón, Espacio Andino 96). Oscar Rivera-Rodas attributes the moralistic tone to the author’s personal Christian beliefs, and R.C. Padden presents Arzáns as a “self-trained Neo-Scholastic whose views of life and reality were thoroughly Augustinian” in order to explain the Historia’s recurring theme of redemption (Padden xxxi–xxxii).

As J.H. Elliott has explained, this type of divine intervention has a long tradition in both Judeo-Christian and Islamic thought and was often a fundamental premise of the treaties written by seventeenth-century arbitristas, or projectors, in order to diagnose the decline of the Spanish empire.

E. P. Thompson, who rejected the notion that the Food Riots in eighteenth-century England had purely material causes, coined the term “moral economy.” He proposed
The Economy of *Criollo* Discourse

that there had to exist, among the impoverished groups, a set of assumptions, a “moral economy,” about the government’s obligations toward them which, when violated, resulted in civil unrest.

The study of *criollismo*, or *criollo* patriotism and cultural identity, has been brought to the fore by critics like José Juan Arrom, Fernando Benítez, and David Brading. More recently several critics, among them Bernard Lavallé, José Antonio Mazzotti, and Antony Higgins, have focused on the pluralistic idea of a *criollismos* and the notion of criollo agency in order to underscore the cultural negotiations at play in *criollo* writing. For an extensive study of Arzáns’s treatment of the term *criollo*, see Denise Galarza Sepúlveda’s *City, Myth and Morality*, specifically chapter four entitled, “*Españoles, Peruanos* and the Naturales of Potosí: The Shifting Signifiers of Cultural Identity.”

All quotes from the *Historia* are henceforth indicated by the volume and page number.

In an essay about the *Historia*’s representation of *criollos*, Elaine Talbot rightly underscores the importance of the city of Potosí as a defining element in the author’s elaboration of a *criollo* identity. However, without questioning the mimetic abilities of the text, she treats the author’s comments as a reflection of a communal psyche and presents the author’s critiques of other groups as mere paranoia: “los habitantes de la ciudad seguían siendo incapaces de ponerse en tela de juicio y habían desarrollado una actitud paranoica” (202).

The popular saying “vale más que un Potosí” still enjoys currency as a phrase that connotes something of immeasurable worth or value (Hanke and Mendoza; Mangan).

With regard to these descriptions of the Cerro and the Villa, I use the term baroque to describe the stylized aesthetic of excessive, ornate, and elaborate imagery and rhetoric. For an insightful discussion of the different aesthetic, political, literary, cultural and theoretical implications and uses of the term baroque see John Beverley’s study “Going Baroque?”

Bakewell has delineated three stages in Potosí’s silver production: 1545 until 1572, 1573 until 1593, and 1594 to 1735 (Bakewell “Registered Silver”).

Although Arzáns does not directly cite the poems of Luis de Góngora or Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, there is a distinct echo here, particularly of Sor Juana’s “Éste que ves, engaño colorido.”

See Oscar Rivera-Rodas, who characterizes Arzáns’s lament for lost riches as a theme characteristic of the Baroque.

While notions about *criollo* inferiority were not philosophically or formally elaborated until the latter half of the eighteenth century by Cornelius DePaw and the
French naturalist Buffon, many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers took up the theories of Hippocrates and other classical thinkers. For example, in his *Corónica moralizada* (1638), the Augustinian criollo, Antonio de la Calancha, explains that the Spaniards born in Peru were indeed of excellent character and superior intellect due to its warm, but temperate climate, which was void of extreme temperatures. He argues, following Hippocrates, that warmer climates produce sharper intellects than colder climes because external cold produces internal heat in the body, “el qual encerrado en las partes interiores del cuerpo, echa al celebro umos i vapores gruesos, que le ofuscan las acciones del entendimiento, por dispor mal de organos de que se aprovecha para sus operaciones, crianse mas robustos, pero menos agudos” (Calancha I: 68).

24 From material history we know that criollo elites occupied positions of authority and enjoyed the political and economic spoils that accompanied their privileged social status. At the same time, however, notions regarding the supposed inferiority of men born in the New World had currency, and so I would argue that Arzáns’s choice of language when referring to the riches of character enjoyed by the criollos of Potosí—“entendimiento” and “memoria”—directly addresses any doubt about criollo intellectual capacity. For a detailed discussion about the debate regarding the effect of the climate and environment on Spaniards born in the Americas, see Gerbi’s *The Dispute of the New World*.

25 Although Arzáns does at times use the term naturales to refer to the indigenous population, it is always accompanied by a descriptor that specifies that he is referring to one of the various “naciones de indios.” Almost always, he prefers the term indios to refer to the Indians that inhabited the city, and he reserves the phrase naturales de Potosí or naturales de esta Villa for the criollos who were born there.

26 See Arturo Uslar Pietri’s *Del Cerro de Plata a los caminos extraviados*, in particular the chapter entitled “El Cerro de Plata,” and Bakewell’s *Silver and Entrepreneurship* (122–23).

27 García Pabón offers an analysis of the cultural negotiations implicit in the public ceremonies and festivals of Potosí (“Indios, criollos y fiesta barroca”).

28 *Historia de la vida de Mecenas* by Juan Pablo Mártir Rizo (Madrid 1626); (qtd. in Elliott 51).

29 In his letter, known as “Alboroto y Motín,” the Mexican historian Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora impuies specific groups for the social and economic crisis that plagued Mexico from 1691–1692. In this case, he blames the various constituents of Mexico City’s plebe, or rabble, for the city’s crimes and riots. When recounting the famine that resulted from a series of events, including floods, Sigüenza y Góngora explains that the plebe disrupted the Crown’s attempts to ameliorate the situation, and notes that this disorderly group was composed “de indios, de negros, criollos y bozales de diferentes naciones, de chinos, de mulatos, de moriscos, de mestizos, de zambaigos de
lobos y también de españoles que, en declarándose zaramullos (que es lo mismo que pícaros, chulos y arrebatacapas) y degenerando sus obligaciones, son los peores entre tan ruin canalla” (Sigüenza y Góngora 113). This condemnation echoes the kind of accusation and distancing that Arzáns employs when blaming specific groups of Spanish forasteros for his city’s woes. It should also be noted that the above term “criollos y bozales de diferentes naciones” modifies the term negro, and serves to distinguish between the blacks who were born and raised in the New World and those who were newly-arrived from Africa; in this context, criollo does not refer to the Spaniards born in the Indies.

The term moradores, while necessarily including the criollos of Potosí, does not implicate them, given the manner in which criollos are set apart for their generosity and their propensity toward all manner of public acts of devotion and alms giving.

In his study, Nations before Nationalism, John A. Armstrong explains that ethnic groups developed through a process of perceived difference to other groups; this process of differentiation was often tied to differences in language. He further explains that, before nationalism, deep affiliations were often founded on shared citizenship and on the symbols and myths that reinforced individual and communal belonging to a given city or region.

Julián Ruiz Rivera calls Arzáns’s treatment of the war an anachronism, stating that he uses it to represent the criollo and peninsular rivalry at a time in which the distinction between these two groups would not yet have taken root (127–28). While he does include an apocryphal monologue in which a criollo complains bitterly about the manner in which he and his compatriots are treated by Peninsular Spaniards, the vast majority of Arzáns’s representation centers on the provisional nature of national alliances during these years of civil war. As Ruiz Rivera specifies, the main groups in this war consisted of “vascos, castellanos, andaluces, extremeños, portugueses, catalanes, navarros y criollos, más alemanes y extranjeros en general” (124).

There is evidence that Arzáns originally intended to use the title “Tres destrucciones de Potosí” for the Historia. The first of these crises was the civil war between the vicuñas and the vascongados in the 1620s, the second the catastrophic flood that occurred in 1626 when the Caricari dam collapsed, and the third was the drastic devaluation of coinage in 1652, the result of the widespread adulteration of the silver pieces minted in Potosí. However, the great number of additional calamities that the author describes, in addition to the anecdotes about the public and private lives of the inhabitants of Potosí, overwhelms those three original catastrophes, rendering insufficient a title or, for that matter, a narrative organization based on only three scourges.

This situation was further aggravated by the rising cost of extracting and processing silver ore. For a more detailed description of the crisis in Potosí’s coinage see Bakewell’s Silver and Entrepreneurship, particularly pages 36–44.
As García Pabón has noted, Arzáns’s writing was heavily influenced by the Jesuit Juan de Nieremberg’s 1640 treatise entitled *De la diferencia entre lo temporal y lo eterno*, which was typical of the kind of scholasticism that flourished during the Counter-reformation (García Pabón *Espacio Andino*, 108–11). The tone of this neo-Scholasticism has been characterized as tragic due in part to its rejection of all worldly things and its denouncement of the brevity, inconsistency and the deception of temporal life. Explaining how Arzáns borrowed directly from Nieremberg’s writing, García Pabón also notes that Arzáns’s diverges from the Jesuit philosopher precisely due to the exaltation of his native Potosí. Following García Pabón, I would add that Arzáns’s concerns about economic decline and his desire to proclaim the greatness of his patria and his compatriots lead him to value and even exalt the temporal realm. It should also be noted that Arzáns employs a combination of moralistic and empirical treatment of “decline” that was typical of the treatises written by seventeenth-century Spanish arbitristas when diagnosing the state of the Kingdom. For a detailed discussion of this rhetoric, see J.H. Elliott’s essay, “Self-Perception and Decline in Early Seventeenth-Century Spain.”

The mines of the Viceroyalty of Peru and specifically Potosí were made to pay a royal fifth taxation on minted silver until 1735, while those of New Spain were granted a reduction by half and had to pay a tenth (Ruiz Rivera 132).

According to Mendoza, the practice of requiring a direct payment of silver from the Indians in addition to or in place of the labor stipulated by the *mita* system was addressed legally in 1692 in order to try to alleviate the burden placed on the indigenous population (II: 364–65, specifically notes 1 and 2).

Silver smuggled from Potosí traveled illicitly through Buenos Aires during Potosí’s silver boom, which roughly coincided with the annexation of Portugal to Spain (1580–1640) and, according to Stanley and Barbara Stein, that illicit trade constituted an estimated 20–25% of Potosi’s total output (Stein & Stein 33).

For a detailed description of the sources Arzáns did and did not use, see Hanke’s introduction to the *Historia*, specifically I: xlix–lxiw. It has also been established that Arzáns wrote most of the *Historia* by 1708 (Mendoza I: xciii–xciv). Lewis Hanke and Oscar Rivera-Rodas concur that the chapters written post 1708 have a journalistic quality. A comparative study of Arzáns’s writing style and that of eighteenth-century journalists has yet to be conducted; Hanke and Rivera-Rodas seem to be alluding to a modern view of journalism: the reporting of current events that is accompanied by commentary and some kind of cultural, social or political critique.

In the early colonial period *visitas* were used to gather economically relevant information about Indian populations; they later became the vehicle through which royal administrators were secretly or publicly investigated.
41 Several varieties of public shaming flourished during the eighteenth century. For an in-depth discussion of *infamia*, or infamy, as well as the prevalence of *carteles*, or inflammatory libels, and other public acts of shaming, see Ruth Hill, *Hierarchy, Commerce and Fraud*, particularly pages 81–91.

42 Within colonial studies, much has been made of the antagonisms between *criollos* and *peninsulares*. Recently, Ruth Hill has argued against the facile assumption that these rivalries actually reflected a static social division or even a socio-political hierarchy in which *peninsulares* enjoyed a superior position as compared to *criollos*. She argues that those relationships must be discussed in light of “the microhistorical dimension of social relationships, especially economic relationships” (10).

43 In the chapters prior to the 1700s, Arzáns primarily employs the term *juventud de España* to represent the recently-arrived Spaniards with no specific negative connotation; they are individuals who are susceptible to the city’s various civil conflicts, often mere casualties without names or stories.

44 Across the Atlantic, the depopulation of Spain was blamed for Spain’s seventeenth-century decline as some *arbitristas*, following Giovanni Botero’s *The Reason of State* (1589), argued that only a large population could restore Spain’s power and wealth (Elliott 74–75).

45 For a thorough study of the sumptuary laws enacted by the Crown to regulate dressing protocol, see Mariselle Meléndez’s essay entitled “Visualizing Difference.”

46 The rise of “pobreza de solemnidad” petitions in colonial Quito is examined by Cynthia Milton who points out that, if granted, this petition exempted a “poor Spaniard” from all legal fees, allowing him to defend what property and goods he did have (618).

WORKS CITED


