

Power, Ideology and Ritual: The Practice of Agriculture in the Inca Empire

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Introduction

Scholars have long debated the nature and basis of political power in complex societies, and ideology has figured prominently in their debates as a force explaining and actively validating the social order. "An ideology tells the members of a group who they are and explains their relations to one another, to people outside the group, to the past and future, to nature, and to the cosmos" (Conrad 1992:159). In so doing, an ideology has the potential to be an active political force, "a system, or at least an amalgam, of ideas, strategies, tactics, and practical symbols for promoting, perpetuating, or changing a social and cultural order" (Friedrich 1989: 301). In state societies, the ideologies propagated by the dominant class have often been touted as the handmaidens of power, legitimating and securing the continuance of dominant interests. Ideologies are seen as the building blocks of consensus, convincing the subordinate of the "normal," "common sense" nature of their situation, and thereby reducing the need for a violent expression and confirmation of power relations. In other words, people in a state society obey their rulers either because they are made to believe a carefully crafted state ideology, or because they fear reprisal, or both. In this view, power is maintained by the interplay between violence and an ideologically driven consensus. Yet recent studies of power have emphasized its nature as a domain of possibilities rather than an instrument of control (Gramsci 1977, 1978; Foucault 1982). Power is the ability of certain agents or groups to impact and modify the actions of others. It can involve domination and resistance, but also persuasion, acceptance, and mitigated support. As such, Foucault notes that power requires neither violence nor consensus in order to take effect, although it often makes use of one or both to achieve its ends (1982: 220). If power relations can exist without consensus, then what role does ideology play in the maintenance of power? Why and in what way does ideology remain politically relevant?

The Inca empire, stretching more than 5500 km from present-day Ecuador to Chile in the South American Andes, was built up in less than a century by a series of successive conquests which culminated only with the arrival of the Spaniards in 1532. Given the speed and the extent of their conquests, one wonders how the Incas were able to secure their hold on the regions they acquired, and how local highland populations were made to accept or at least tolerate new relations of power with their conquerors. Conrad (1992) suggests that the Inca rulers resorted to a "Great

Simplification,” reducing complex, traditional systems of thought to a few simple, powerful ideas which were disseminated throughout their empire. In other words, the Incas were good advertisers, and their clever manipulation of Andean ideologies enabled them to motivate ever-increasing numbers of citizens, most of them non-Inca, to obey and serve state interests. Yet, if most of the Incas’ subjects were convinced ideologically to accept their situation, one wonders why they later reported having rebelled several times against their conquerors (Murra 1978: 930). Moreover, if state ideology, simple and powerful though it may have been, did not instill in their subjects a sense of duty and destiny, one continues to wonder how the Incas established supremacy so quickly over such a wide area. Spanish and Inca chroniclers tell of huge armies, an elaborate administrative system, the recruitment of local elites, and a practice of ethnic mixing, all of which would have mitigated or deterred subversion (Rowe 1982). Yet, it is hard to believe that imperial might could be based on preventive measures alone.

In this essay, I propose that rituals played a crucial role in establishing and maintaining hierarchical relations among the Incas and their new subjects. As a “rule governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance” (Connerton 1989: 44), ritual practice was an apparently benign yet powerful medium of communication and interaction between the state and the communities it ruled. The apparent practical orientation of most rituals, their multivocality and ambiguity, and their position at the center of everyday life, enabled them to address several matters at once in ways that were meaningful and appealing to several different groups. This paper suggests that a new emphasis should be put on the social and political import, as well as the political efficacy, of agricultural rituals. “Rituals are worth studying because they orient and shape other social practices” (Gose 1994: 4). The rites of the Inca empire are no exception.

Rituals and the Peasant Community

The Nature of Agricultural Rituals

In the Inca empire, the year was filled with many celebrations, including some related to the cults of the Inca rulers – both living and dead – and to the “cults of their false gods” (Cobo 1990). Ceremonies related to the agricultural cycle were particularly regular among these celebrations. At the level of both the community and the state, agricultural ceremonies were scheduled to coincide with important farming events such as the tilling, sowing, and reaping of crops (Bauer 1996), and they were an occasion at which peasants were impressed with the importance of religion to the operation of the world, and of the state.

Two thirds of the land in the provinces was employed to cultivate crops for the Inca state and cult. Work on these fields took precedence over all other agricultural work, and the peasants who did it also took part in a series of state-led, state-funded rituals for the growth of maize, the semi-sacred crop of the Andes. On the remaining third of cultivable lands, peasants were both allowed and encouraged to continue producing subsistence crops in the ancestral way (Cobo 1990). Tubers, well adapted to alpine conditions and requiring little extra investment of labor, were the staple crop and mainstay of the diet in the highlands, even though they were considered a low-status food. The superimposition of the Inca regimen onto the traditional one resulted in a two-tiered system of agriculture. This was accompanied by “significant differences between two ways of life, one of which – the power-wielding Inca state – was in the process of incorporating and transforming the other, a process far from completed when the European invasion arrested its course” (Murra 1960: 401). This situation allows us a rare glimpse into the changes that transpired in the traditional life of small rural communities as they became integrated as subject polities of a powerful, extensive, hegemonic state. Agricultural rituals, central to the agricultural cycle and therefore to the sustenance of both the community and the state, offer us a view of the mechanisms and agendas of continuity and change which operated at the level of the community.

Agricultural work and rituals were, and still are, the complementary halves of an overarching system of farming. Ethnographic sources suggest that at present, Andean rituals are perceived not only as an aid to agricultural production but as an integral and indispensable part of the agricultural cycle itself. Rituals operate alongside labor to produce crops, and just as labor irrigates the land, tills the field, and plants the seeds, rituals provide “a way of focusing and expressing the cultural intentions that ultimately guide all labor” (Gose 1994: 7). In this symbiotic relationship, rituals infuse the labor process with a specific cultural texture and sense and they derive their own meaning from the practical acts they shape. Gose (*ibid.*) shows that it is through the resulting spiral of reciprocal influences and positive feedbacks that labor and rituals together create and constitute the Andean agricultural cycle. It seems reasonable to expect that a similar perception may have prevailed in Inca times, when agriculture and rituals were clearly central concerns of the ideology and practices of daily life in Andean communities.

Rituals operated not only to control ecological and weather conditions, but also to consolidate the relationships and interdependencies essential to the peasants’ work. The rituals brought together the members of a community, encouraging sociability and collaboration, and helping to “socialize” difficulties. In a very pragmatic way, this process contributed to the success of agricultural endeavors (Contreras-Hernandez 1985: 118). It also directly underlay the involvement of agricultural rituals in and with the wider social world. Just as agriculture was

inconceivable without its ritual component, so the rituals of agriculture could not be fathomed without a strong social component. They depended on and impacted social and political matters in such a way that they could never be understood apart from them. Ritual actions, their meaning and their efficacy were structured by the social and political relations and practices around them, but in turn they also structured them.

State Rituals - The Sowing of Maize

The agriculture of the Inca empire built upon and continued a long-time cultural preference for maize over other crops. In highland communities, maize was both a desirable food and a necessary ritual implement, though it was ill-adapted to highland conditions and its cultivation was risky. Even following the Spanish conquest, the chronicler Cobo (1990) was impressed by the "extraordinary fondness for farming" he noticed in the Andes, where Indians dropped all that they were doing in order to produce a little maize, even though it cost them more than it was worth. It seemed to him that work in the fields was "one of the major forms of recreation and festivals" (Cobo 1990: 212). The Inca state was able to expand the production of maize and to make it a symbol of empire. The sowing of the maize in the month of August involved much planning, divination and propitiation by Inca ritual specialists, as well as participation at different levels by all tiers of the population. State rituals were organized and centered in Cuzco, but provincial capitals apparently put on similar, smaller-scale versions of the ceremonies, and the regional administration sponsored generalized festivities throughout the empire (Rowe 1982: 108-110).

The rituals accompanying the planting of the crop were particularly consequential and given much elaborate preparation. Each year, priests in Cuzco studied the movements of the Sun to ascertain the time at which plowing, irrigation, and planting should begin, and they organized processions to mitigate or chase away frost and drought (Murra 1960: 399). In the villages, people fasted and offered sacrifices to the same effect. Then, the sowing of the corn took place.

If the Inca himself, or his governor, or any other important lord happened to be present, he started [plowing] with a golden tacla or plow, which was brought to him, and following his example, all the other lords and nobles who accompanied him did the same. However, the Inca soon stopped working, and after him the other lords and nobles stopped also, and they sat down with the king to have their banquets and fiestas ... The common people remained at work. (Cobo 1979: 212)

The entire population took part in the planting of maize, and it seems this may have been one occasion in which the empire as a whole collaborated and partook in activities with a common, collective goal. During the ensuing growing season, the priests of the Sun

were careful to fast from the time the maize was sown until it was a finger's length out of the ground. Their wives and children also fasted [...] All the common people celebrated a feast called yahuayra, from the name of the song they chanted in which they besought the Creator to grant them a prosperous year. (Molina 1964: 20)

Clearly, common people had a crucial part to play in state-led agricultural rituals which aimed at ensuring the welfare of the maize crop. In fact, this obligation was "so impressed upon the Indians that it was one of the most important religious duties that they had; so much so that no one dared pass by these fields [of the Sun and of the state] without showing their respect with words of veneration that they had reserved for the purpose" (Cobo 1979: 211). While few peasants in the empire would have been able to participate or even witness the main ceremonies in Cuzco, most of them experienced some version of the state-sponsored feasts and ceremonies. The obligation to cultivate and celebrate the fields of the Inca and the Sun before their own must have made them well aware throughout the growing cycle of the overarching and hegemonic presence of the state. Imperial agriculture and its rituals quickly became an undeniably central part of life in the highlands of the empire.

Traditional Rituals - Sowing Potatoes

While the cultivation of maize was mostly taken over and directed by the Inca state, potato cultivation was left in the hands of the peasants. The small-scale rituals performed for Andean root crops are much less well documented than the large public maize rituals of the Incas. Nevertheless, one good description comes from a Spanish priest, who observed the performance of a potato ritual in his diocese of Lampa Lampa in the Lake Titicaca region in 1537.

From different directions came the sound of the beating of many drums ... and then blankets were spread on the ground in the square, like carpets, for the caciques and headmen to sit on, all decked out and dressed in their best clothes, their hair hanging in a four-strand braid on each side, as is their custom. When they were seated, I saw a boy of about 12 advance toward each of the caciques; he was the handsomest and most agile of all, and richly dressed ... In his right hand he carried a kind of arm like a halberd, and in his left, a bag of wool in which they carry coca. On his left side came a girl of about

ten, very pretty, dressed in the same fashion ... Behind her came many other indian women. And that girl carried in her right hand a beautiful woolen bag, covered with ornaments of gold and silver, and from her shoulders hung a small puma skin which completely covered her back. Behind these women there followed six indians representing farmers ... These were followed by six more, like helpers, with bags of potatoes, playing the drum, and in order they came to within a step of the cacique.

The farmers sank their ploughs in the ground in a row, and hung from them those bags of potatoes, large and carefully selected; and when they had done this, playing their drums, they began a kind of dance without moving from where they were standing, on the tips of their toes, and from time to time they lifted the bags they had in their hands towards the sky ... The caciques and other people, seated in order of rank, watched and listened in silence. (Cieza de Leon 1959: 267-269)

The ritual was eventually interrupted by a newly converted Christian headman, but this first-hand account gives a good impression of the steps involved in a community ritual possibly quite similar to those which were performed prehistorically. Much like the state ritual, this one was an opportunity for the community to get together, to address important issues of natural stress, and to emphasize the nature of the social order. In fact, both community and state rituals made use of similar kinds of structures, acts and symbols, and whether performed voluntarily or imposed forcefully, they could have been accepted as different versions of a similar endeavor to deal with the forces of nature.

Legitimization

A Continuity of Rituals through Time

Rituals are a form of repetition, a re-enactment of what was done in the past, an imitation of previous rituals. As such, they imply a certain continuity with the past. Yet many rituals go beyond mere repetition to actively emphasize and pursue their link with the past. They commemorate an ideological and practical continuity with what came before, thus conveying and sustaining images of the past, and establishing a kind of social memory of the participants in ritual (Connerton 1989: 48). We know historically that many of the actions used in Inca maize rituals in Cuzco commemorated and recalled the primordial actions of specific Inca mythical heroes, drawing on the past knowledge and common experience of those involved to understand their significance and meaning in the ritual context (Bauer 1996). This

common understanding is what legitimated and empowered the rituals for the people of Cuzco.

Yet these same maize rituals involved a significant break with the past in small, tightly knit communities outside of Cuzco. They were brought in under new circumstances and organized by outsiders who gave them priority over traditional practices. One might wonder how this was justified, or simply how this new set of rituals became acceptable in the eyes of the community. In order to be understood, and certainly to gain any kind of local legitimacy, the ideologies expressed in agricultural rituals had to be based on ideologies and myths that were familiar and widely shared within the community (Conrad 1992: 165). If state agricultural rituals were to succeed in taking their place alongside traditional rituals, they could not run counter to the beliefs of the communities they sought to convince.

Either deliberately or inadvertently, the Inca elite set about creating a flexible, versatile ideology, by appropriating elements of local cults into the formal pantheon, and tolerating other local deities and sacred objects insofar as their cults did not conflict with the imperial religion (Rowe 1982: 108). Conrad and Demarest suggest that the Inca upper pantheon was made up of a single multifaceted sky god whose nebulous identity would unfold and crystallize only in ceremonial contexts (1984: 100). In this way, the superimposition of Inca deities onto local pantheons did not appear as a radical change, so much as a shift in emphasis or a renaming of locally known deities already worshipped locally throughout the Andes. In ideology and rituals, as in administration and agriculture, the imperial way was superimposed onto the local one with little direct interference.

In addition, rituals were legitimized – and legitimizing – in their use of age-old Andean principles such as reciprocity. Ritual ceremonies were an obligatory, ideologically charged “gift” from the state, and in return for the gracious hospitality they received, peasants owed allegiance and labor on state lands. Agricultural and religious in name, the rituals were also a way to establish a relationship between the new leaders and those they led, and to institute a new world-order along certain traditional lines. Instead of a major break with tradition, the Inca cultural and religious onslaught was couched in terms of an addition or bifurcation in the path of tradition.

A Hierarchy of Rituals

In order to be acceptable and understandable within the framework of the community, state rituals made use of many of the same actions and traditions as local rituals, just on a grander scale. Both involved divination and propitiation, the ritual enactment of planting or harvesting, and much celebration and feasting. As Connerton

(1989: 9) suggests, by invertedly recalling a set of locally known beliefs and actions, the new ritual complex could legitimately subjugate and replace local maize rituals, at least in the eyes of the Inca elites.

Juxtaposition with local rituals enabled the Inca rituals to take their place continuously and contiguously with local traditions. State maize rituals enacted on the fields of the Inca king and cult paralleled in certain ways the local rituals performed on community lands. Similarities of expression between the state and community rituals created a "hierarchy of rites" performed from the state down to the community level, where each rite echoed other rites, implying them, assuming them and extending them. This empire-wide continuity at different levels of ritual activity could create a sense of totality, a logic which seemed to coincide with the logic organizing the social body and nature in general (Bell 1992: 129). In this way, local cults evoking unofficial and non-hierarchical imagery were limited in their prestige and ability to grow unless they secured official recognition by the Inca state. In essence, the institution of state maize rituals destined local community rituals to be small and secondary in importance. Not only did the Inca rituals infiltrate the ritual system of the Andes, establishing for themselves a sense of legitimacy and continuity with the past, but they crowded out local versions of the same rituals and displaced other local rituals from the center stage of religion and politics. After gaining legitimacy through their correspondence with local rites, they may slowly have become the template against which all rituals, foreign and local, would be judged.

Manipulation - Shaping Peoples' Perceptions

Producing the Social Order

State agricultural rituals, performed in lieu of or in addition to traditional ones, were an obvious way to propagate the imperial version of the past. Ritual songs and recitations were a means of remembering publicly the exploits of the past. Ritual enactment of mythical events and ritual support of mythical claims established a version of history as told by the Inca. The importance given to maize by the Incas is illustrated in an origin myth which refers to the concurrent introduction of maize and civilization into the Cuzco basin by their ancestors (Kendall 1973: 148; Bauer 1996: 332). The ritual planting of Mama Huaco's fields in Cuzco every year commemorated this version of the past. By referring explicitly to prototypical persons or events, the ceremonies served to shape communal memory in a way favorable to the dominant group. At the level of the empire, this "control of society's memory largely [conditioned] the hierarchy of power" (Connerton 1989: 2). Throughout the conquered territories, the glorified epic version of the Inca past dominated the Andes, supporting, naturalizing, and in effect "supernaturalizing" the order of power relations as they stood in the powerful grip of the Inca. "Rituals and myths [were]

used to support the ruling elites' privileged positions, and through them the powers of the state [became] inextricably mixed with the maintenance of the social order" (Bauer 1996: 334).

Of the greatest import in the Inca manipulation of the past were the state rituals performed or witnessed by the non-Inca subjects of the empire. These rituals were made to "remember" the community's identity as told in an Inca master narrative (Connerton 1989: 70). Maize rituals emphasized the divine origins of the Inca, the importance of the maize crop and the pomp and glory of the state. They were paralleled by local, non-state ceremonies such as those performed for potatoes, which commemorated the communal aspect of potato cultivation and the relations of the living with the ancestors. These two parallel and opposing ritual complexes went beyond enacting the past to symbolically representing the present social order. They echoed at an ideological and cosmological level the practical duality of the communities' position in the Inca empire, where they were both autonomous in their own realm and subordinate within the empire. The ceremonial complexes in which the peasants participated were simply another dimension of the socio-economic and political reality with which they were faced. On the one hand, they continued to live as before, performing the same rites for the subsistence crops they grew. On the other hand, they were ruled by Inca nobles who required that they participate in a Sun cult and work to produce state crops.

By reiterating the imperial social order, the order of rituals had the potential to legitimize and naturalize it. Agricultural rituals, concerned explicitly with supernatural and environmental forces, provided a seemingly "disinterested" statement on the order of things in society. The social body as represented in these rituals appeared, therefore, as a natural outcome imposed by a supernatural source. Rituals, in this sense, were able to configure a vision of the order of power in the world, "a lived system of meanings, a more or less unified moral order ... confirmed and nuanced in experience" (Bell 1992: 83). As such, they were involved not only in depicting but in actually producing the social order.

Creating a New Ideology

The ideology expressed in the rituals of the Inca empire, and embodied in changes in the landscape and social structure of many communities, must have influenced the entire worldview of the peasantry. Through their hegemonic rule, Inca rulers sought to effect a profound reform of the consciousness of their subjects, to convince them of the "common sense" nature of their situation (see Gramsci 1977; 1978). By manipulating the pantheon and making reference to ancient Andean traditions, agricultural rituals contributed to the creation and perpetuation of a new

empire-wide ideology which encompassed much more than simple religious or cultural values.

Ideas publicized by the state about the divine status of the Inca people justified and upheld the dominant political position of the Inca rulers of the empire. As descendants of the Sun, the Incas implicitly became the beneficiaries of all practices aimed at worshipping it. Many agricultural rituals implicitly became part of the imperial complex in this way, although many others were governed by the moon and the Pleiades (Moseley 1992: 56). In the economic realm, official ideology was able to deny and transform potential contradictions so as to represent Inca interests as universal. In official rhetoric, there was no contradiction in the self-sufficiency of the very communities who partook in "reciprocal" exchanges of labor-for-celebrations with the Inca state. Most of the crops cultivated on state fields were stored locally, and they were used to support state personnel, to feed the army, and to finance festive ceremonies for the local population in return for their help. In a very concrete way, ideas about the practical and ritual superiority of maize propelled the production of an agricultural surplus for state use as the "social" return of corn was much greater than that of any other crop.

In these ways, ideology played an active role in integrating and mobilizing the state's social, political, and economic institutions. Its unifying force enabled the Inca state to incorporate an increasingly eclectic set of isolationist polities into an expanding, hegemonic realm. Newly conquered peoples, who had been their own lords and masters for several generations, were confronted with a seemingly unified imperial ideology embodied in a set of interrelated and interdependent religious, political and economic practices.

Convincing the Community

It would clearly be a mistake to assume that the official ideology created and disseminated by the state was shared equally by everyone in the society (see Hodder 1986). Official ideology and rituals backed by the state proclaimed the Inca ruler to be the all-powerful Son of the Sun, who ruled benevolently over his empire and upheld the good, "natural" order of society and the world. In the society at large, however, Cobo tells us that "very few common people understood the purpose of the tasks in which the Incas kept them occupied, nor did they have the permission to ask about it" (1990: 99). The complete significance of the state-sponsored rituals in which they participated probably also eluded them. In all likelihood, only the dominant class willingly accepted the notions propagated by the state ideology. The myth of their natural, supernaturally sanctioned dominance, appealing as it was, could provide them with the collective confidence and "ideological tenacity" which they needed to rule over their Andean counterparts (Conrad & Demarest 1984: 110). The conquered

were much less likely than their victors to accept tales about a supernaturally sanctioned status quo.

Although it is tempting to wonder to what degree each party believed their situation to be unchangeable, the issue hinges rather on *how* they believed. Indeed, by focusing exclusively on the strength of their personal ideas and convictions, we ignore the multiple but collective nature of ideology. Pease points out that “whether the ruled feel a profound conviction about the legitimacy of their system, or mitigated support for it, or latent opposition, we are dealing with different forms of a historical force: the force of ideas, of ideologies, a force which springs not only from their consent, but from the way in which [the ideas] are shared” (1982: 182).

In the Inca empire, the ideas of the upper class were made apparent and imposed on the local population through a range of institutions. They were also articulated in religious terms and enacted in organized participatory rituals. These rituals were collective experiences, performed in similar fashion by those involved, and as such, they offered a forum for the expression of ideological notions and values that were to be shared among the participants. Connerton writes that people who disagreed with this ideology would have resisted having to participate in an alien set of rites incompatible with their “truth” (1989: 44). Yet, are we to surmise that universal participation in Inca rituals indicated a consensus about the ideology they carried with them?

Colonial records suggest, in fact, that the peasants were forced to participate in state rituals. Participation was an obligation in the same way that working state land or weaving state wool was unavoidable. It was neither a matter of belief, nor a voluntary enterprise, but an obligatory task probably tolerated only of necessity (Kendall 1973). In fact, in the early colonial period following the Spanish conquest, Inca rituals were readily discarded by a peasantry only too glad to rid itself of Inca rule. Peasants who had tolerated an Inca vision of the world without ever accepting or adopting its underlying tenets were finally able to do away with their superficial adherence to the imperial cults. In contrast to this, they continued steadfastly to focus their attention on their own local cults, keeping them alive until the present day in spite of intense persecution by the Christian church (Moore 1958: 26). Unlike the Spaniards, the Incas were less concerned with the spiritual allegiance of their subjects, than with their physical, practical acceptance of the state religion and its rituals in everyday life (Kendall 1973: 181). Many local cults were respected and allowed to persist alongside state cults, as long as they did not interfere with the latter. It is tempting to ask why the state was so concerned with the ritual performance of peasant communities. In an ironic reversal of traditional Marxist notions, one wonders if the state was being duped or blinded by the performance of the peasants, into thinking that they believed its propaganda.

Ritualization - Acting Things Out

A Form of Practice

Although ritual is a vehicle for ideological expression, it distinguishes itself from myths or narratives by the fact that it is an act: performance, the practice of ritual, is a must (Rappaport in Bell 1992: 43). Ritual practice, far from being secondary to ritual ideology, is in fact an essential characteristic of ritual, which must be taken into account to distinguish it from myth and ideological narrative. Moreover, it is as a form of practice that ritual plays a distinct role and has a social impact different from that of myth. As a mode of social action, ritual impacts on and transforms the participants' practical logic, their *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977).

Witness, for example, the claim that the Incas were powerful and unchallengeable because they had been divinely chosen to conquer and rule the Andes. As a simple statement or social myth it probably held little interest and only limited convincing value for a self-sufficient peasantry who experienced forceful conquest and was made to serve state interests. Witness, however, the peasants' participation in large state-sponsored rituals for the cultivation of maize, the sacred crop of the Inca. Peasants were confronted not only with a new Inca social and political reality but also with a new set of ritualized practices in which they were to participate actively, taking part ceremonially as they would have to take part economically in the smooth operation of the empire. In agriculture, the practical knowledge of the peasantry was recontextualized and redefined to serve state interests. By performing labor tasks and rituals similar to those they had performed locally since time immemorial, peasants did not need to think in terms of a distant all-powerful and supernaturally ordained Inca king. They could experience first hand the nature of his rule and the extent of his power, divine or not. They were affected by and involved in his empire at the level of everyday life, and their participation in a new set of rituals played no small part in reminding them of this fact.

The unity of Inca culture lay less in the content than in the form of its cultural practices. In fact, the Spanish inability to disseminate Christian values across any single part of the Andes in the colonial period bears testimony to the difficulty of inculcating a centralized ideology over such a wide, heterogeneous area. The notion that the state ideology could have blinded the population to its real conditions of existence assumes a degree of homogeneity, naiveté and passivity on the part of the population that is unsupported in observation and documents. In all practicality, the creation of a single, monolithic, empire-wide belief in gods, practices, and values would have been impossible in the Inca empire, whose constituent populations were eclectic and heterogeneous. In fact, "cultural unification was probably not a primary goal of the Inca government" (Rowe 1982: 94). While imperial ideology may have

played a role in explaining and naturalizing power relations, it seems appropriate to suggest that imperial rituals may well have played a more active part in maintaining the status quo of these power relations in the empire.

The Operation of Rituals

To the new subjects of the Inca empire, the claim that Inca hegemony was inevitable, divinely ordained, and “part of the natural order established at the beginning of human history” (Bauer 1996: 328) probably rang somewhat hollow. After being autonomous and independent for many centuries, how could these groups suddenly come to believe that the strangers who had conquered them knew the world and their history better than their own local leaders and elders? Unless they were made to sense that the world was somehow different than before, there was little reason to accept a different ideology to explain it. We have seen that, for a new set of beliefs to be understandable and acceptable, they would have to make sense in terms of past knowledge and experience. Taking this further, they would also have to be “embodied and reproduced in many activities that [supported] them without much contradiction” in the present (Bell 1992: 191).

With near universal, mandatory participation in both agriculture and rituals, agricultural rituals offered a good arena for the performance of such activities. As mentioned above, the cultivation of state fields extended on a larger scale an activity that had always been undertaken by communities since ancestral times. Moreover, the rituals of agriculture created by the state recalled and paralleled well-known community rituals. At the same time, both of these new practices publicized the omnipresence of the state and the new position in which the communities found themselves following the Inca conquest. State and local rituals carried contrasting meanings and different levels of significance for the community itself, yet they also operated along a continuum of symbolic significance. It would seem that the performance or practice of these two sets of rituals facilitated the reconciliation, along a continuum, of conflicting local and regional ideologies of autonomy and submission.

The orchestration of the rituals in time [enabled] each unit to experience both its own autonomy and its dependent place within the network of its relationships with other groups. The orchestration [was] not a holistic order imposed on the peasants, but a delicate and continual renegotiation of provisional distinctions and integrations so as to avoid encountering the discrepancies and conflicts that would become apparent if the “whole” was obvious. (Bell 1992: 125)

In their capacity as ideologically motivated practices, and requiring only a loose form of consent from their participants, state rituals of agriculture were able to mediate between conflicting, divergent ideologies. Rather than seeking to forge a consensus on ideology and beliefs, these rituals achieved some level of agreement on formal actions and performance. By allowing a great diversity of interpretations in exchange for little more than consent to the form of the activities, ritual practices made room for the fact that even subject peoples would not unconditionally follow or obey. In many different ways, these people had the opportunity to consent, resist, or manipulate aspects of the dominant ideology. In fact, the flexibility of the ritual context made it resistant to casual disagreement, since minor forms of deviation or resistance could be relegated to "the non-threat of rudeness," and therefore left alone (Bloch 1974). Participants in each ritual probably experienced and understood it differently, but their taking part in it implied and demonstrated some degree of consensus and consent, either at the level of ideology or in "mere" practice. Whether the ritual actors were sincere in their actions and whether they participated willingly or not was only mildly relevant to the operation of the ritual. Indeed, the ritual performance itself displayed a unified social body, and this could lead participants and observers to believe that there was more consensus than there actually may have been (Bell 1992: 209). This misrecognition made agricultural rituals quite effective in creating and maintaining relations of power.

The Power of Rituals

State agricultural rituals represented and embodied a set of power relations existing in the Inca empire. In doing so, they supported state ideologies by reconstituting these relations as somehow beyond the community, a product of divine intervention and tradition. Relations between groups thus came to be ordered cosmologically, like the rest of the natural world – in ideology and ritual. Yet, at the level of their expression in rituals, these relations remained flexible, negotiable and even to a degree challengeable. The ritual representation of state-community relations produced "nuanced relationships of power, relationships characterized by acceptance and resistance, negotiated appropriation, and redemptive reinterpretation of the hegemonic order" (Bell 1992: 197). In this way, rituals of state agriculture naturalized and legitimized Inca supremacy and – in combination with the threat of force – they brought about and sustained imperial authority in a way more subtle and sure than simple brute force. The supernaturalization of imperial power "could not prevent risings but it could help restore a measure of harmony afterwards and make reconciliations ... easier for the losers" (Nelson 1996: 129).

While ritual has often been seen as the mask which hides the crude instruments of power, Bell (1992) argues that in fact, ritual is itself a form of power. It is able simultaneously to inculcate political and cultural values, to convert beliefs

about another world into facts about this one and vice versa, and to invent the traditions it claims to transmit (Bell 1992: 194). Agricultural rituals operated as an essential part of agriculture, helping the crops to grow. At the same time, they offered an opportunity to reassert social and power relations. On the one hand, they could promote social solidarity within communities and, on the other, they could legitimate the distribution of power within the empire. Local populations were free to continue engaging in their own agricultural and religious practices insofar as they also took part in imperial projects and rites. Their seemingly benign agreement to participate in the rituals of the state in fact tuned the peasants in to their position in a new imperial society. Their ritual engagement in the operation of the empire contributed to shaping the world in which the peasants lived and altering their perception of it.

When, at the Spanish conquest, peasants immediately quit performing Inca state rituals, they were reacting to the politically charged nature of these rituals. Apparently the peasants never believed that Inca gods were superior to their own. In fact, they witnessed the demise of the Inca and their “false gods” at the hands of the Spaniards but continued, sometimes at great peril, to worship their own local gods until the present day. State agricultural rituals were charged with meaning as long as the Inca state was around. They represented and expressed the nature of the state and the position of the population within it. When they were performed, they created a sense of community on a national scale, a sense of “nationality” among the heterogeneous population in the empire. Where the rhetoric pleased the elite, the rituals touched the peasants, making them aware of the greater realm of which they were a part, giving them a sense of belonging to a greater whole, and producing an understanding of imperial might and communal duties. Perhaps some people, drinking maize chicha and eating maize porridge from the church’s fields, even began to give credence to some of the claims of the all-powerful state. For its part, the state cleverly bypassed the desirable but insurmountable task of converting everyone to the dominant ideology, and enforced only peasant participation in state rituals, with its attendant tolerance of a new Inca worldview and its openness to changing conditions. Thus while the Spaniards failed miserably to convert the souls of their Andean subjects, the Inca state, with its more practical orientation, apparently succeeded in establishing maize cultivation and imperial rituals on a near-universal scale throughout the empire. The power of rituals was an important and effective element of the Inca domination of the Andes.

Conclusion

The Inca state put much effort into ensuring participation in the agricultural cycle of maize production and its attendant ritual cycle. Looking at ritual as ideological manipulation and indoctrination makes this effort difficult to understand. Most subject peoples had no reason or incentive to believe a new Inca history and worldview, and it seems unlikely that even the Inca elite believed wholeheartedly in

the persuasive influence of their ideology within the provincial communities. Turning to the active side of ritual and "ritualization," the efforts of the state to stage impressive participatory rituals become more intelligible. Ritual action was a powerful means of expressing at least a partial acceptance of the ideology at hand and it required little more than the negotiated compliance of the participants. Ritualized action was a way for the Inca elite to convince themselves and the peasantry of the legitimacy, or at least of the tolerability, of their imperial rule. Ultimately, it may have been in the interest of all those involved to compromise on the expression and legitimation of the imperial relations of power. For the conquered groups, ritual "ideologization" would imply an unequal distribution of power, but it also implied a greater distribution of power than would have been the case if relations developed exclusively by force. For the state, gaining even the conditional consent of the peasantry was less hazardous and less costly than having to quell multiple rebellions. What could be a better source of power than a set of rituals performed regularly, involving the entire tax-paying population, in an activity recognized by all as crucial to the survival of both the people and the state? Under the aegis of agriculture, acknowledgment and acceptance of state presence and state power became a part of the rituals of everyday life of the Andean peasantry.

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