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CACIQUISM IN 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES ARGENTINA: INDIGENOUS, CRIOLLOS AND THE STATE

O caciquismo na Argentina dos séculos XIX e XX: indígenas, crioulos e o estado

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the phenomenon of caciquism in post-colonial Argentina, particularly that which occurred throughout the 19th century. The goal is to provide a synoptic overview that frames the ambiguity and outcome of the negotiations, alliances, and conflicts that occurred between the leaders of Argentina's indigenous structures, the Creole leaders, and the Argentine state. The scope of this research focuses on analyzing the sociological correlations that resulted from the interaction of the constitutive variables of a post-colonial triangle: caciquism, Creoles, and the state.

Resumo

O presente artigo tem como objetivo levar a cabo a análise do fenómeno do caciquismo na Argentina pós-colonial, particularmente, aquele que ocorreu ao longo do séculos XIX. Busca-se uma visão sinótica que enquadre a ambiguidade e desfecho das negociações, aliança e conflitos que ocorreram entre as chefias das estruturas autóctones da Argentina, as lideranças criollas e o Estado argentino. O escopo desta investigação foca-se na análise das correlações sociológicas que resultaram da interação das variáveis constitutivas de um triângulo pós-colonial: caciquismo, criollos e Estado.

Key-words: *Caciquism; Criollos, Argentine State, 19th Century.*

Palavras-chave: *Caciquismo; Criollos, Estado Argentino, Século XIX.*

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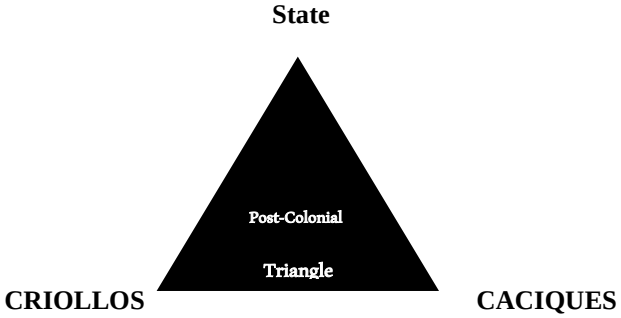
INTRODUCTION

The present research, entitled “Caciquismo in Argentina in the 19th and 20th centuries” aims to analyze the complex social phenomenon of caciquismo and understand the contours that shaped the development of the post-colonial process. When we use the concept "cacique," we must place it in proper context, as its meaning changes whenever we manipulate the variables of time and space. According to the Houaiss Dictionary of the Portuguese Language, this concept (kasike) appears to derive from a language spoken in the Antilles - Taino -, which was adopted by Portuguese and Spanish colonizers to refer to the indigenous chiefs of the autochthonous communities: initially, this concept served to characterize the influence that these tribal chiefs exerted over local communities during the colonial period, controlling resources, political decisions and, often, even economic and social issues in their areas of influence (Alvarez Kern, 1985, p. 27). In the colonial context, which comprises the 16th and 18th centuries, it is important to note that caciquism should be understood not simply as a form of traditional leadership nor a remnant of pre-colonial organizations, but as a dynamic institution, profoundly adapted to the demands of the colonial system and indigenous survival strategies. The figure of the “cacique” had several functions: territorial manager, economic redistributor, political mediator, and, in critical situations, military commander. This versatility was essential for the maintenance of the limited autonomy of indigenous communities in the face of colonial abuses and forced assimilation to which indigenous people were subjected (CASTRO GONZÁLEZ, 2015, p. 42). The articulation between the indigenous system of caciquism and the Spanish colonial order produced a hybrid configuration of power and authority during the colonial period. On the one hand, the colonizers considered the chiefs as legitimate authorities within their communities, using them as instruments of control and mediation. On the other hand, the chiefs themselves took advantage of this position to consolidate their power and protect, when possible, the interests of their groups (GALHEGOS FILIPPE, 2017, p. 35).

On June 9, 1916, Argentina declared its independence. Precisely a year earlier, the Congress of Free Peoples had declared war on the colonizing power. This milestone per se was no miracle: slavery continued to exist, and many of the signatory delegates were slave owners. Within this revolutionary context, we raise the following question: What was the role of the caciques as an institution inherited from colonialism and the representatives of indigenous peoples? How did caciquism face the challenges of

Argentine independence? What changed after 1852? To answer these questions, we created a triangle made up of the following three angles: caciquism, criollos, and the State, with a double implication amongst them – a conceptual one – according to which, the nature and understanding of one of the angles presupposes the existence and nature of the others – and a functional one – according to which independence, historically, in post-colonial Argentina, will be based on the functioning and role played by each of these realities.

Figure 1 – *Post-colonial triangle*



*S***ource***: Own elaboration*

It is also important to note that, in the context of Latin America, these practices of caciquism continued after the colonies' independence: the only changes that occurred were an adaptation to new political realities, maintaining the logic of local domination and dependence on its leaders. Over time, the concept gained a new meaning, and "caciquismo" also served to refer to a predominant political and social phenomenon, not only in Latin America, but also in Spain, Portugal, and southern Europe, characterized by local dominance exercised by powerful political leaders known as caciques. In Portugal, in the second half of the 19th century, caciques controlled political power, alternating it between the two most influential parties: the Regenerator Party and the Progressive Party. This system would become known historically as rotation (rotativismo) (Proença, 2015, p. 567-570). In Spain, caciquista politics served to identify and characterize the Restoration era (1875-1923): it was a system that provided for peaceful political alternation between the conservative and liberal parties, under the directives of the crown, based on a completely flawed and consensual practice, accepted by both parties: whoever obtained leadership, power was granted, not legitimately, but fraudulently, ingeniously orchestrated by the caciques (MORENO LUZÓN, 2006, p. 9).

1. Independent Argentina

We have seen in this introduction that caciquismo was a powerful institution, whose power was based on the leadership of indigenous communities and control of territories, networks of influence and resources, and all types of mediation between Creoles and colonizers. With Argentina's independence (1816), circumstances changed. Caciquismo adapted to these changes and underwent variations, not only in relation to the colonial period but also throughout the 19th and 20th centuries: new sociopolitical realities altered the concept, which, throughout the 19th century, expanded also to encompass the *caudillos* and rural leaders who controlled vast regions of Argentina, especially in the interior and south of the country.

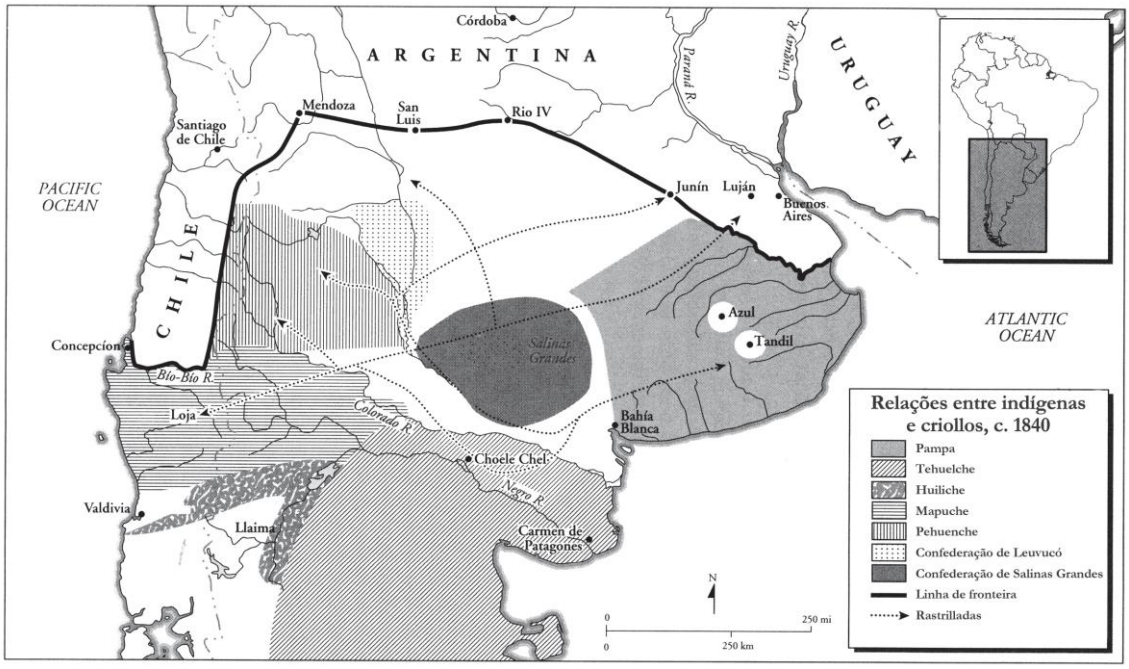
If Brazil experienced, after the cry of Ipiranga, a period of calm and a tradition of political consensus, favored by cultural (religious) syncretism, the reality in neighboring Argentina was quite different: “it was, throughout the entire time, a country where antagonism was the *leitmotif*.” […] While Brazil was ruled by an emperor, the various parts of Argentina were controlled by caudillos who fought among themselves (DI TELLA 2010, p. 71).

Gabriel Passetti states that in the early 19th century, "the region south of the border arc that ran from Buenos Aires to Mendoza, passing through Córdoba and San Luis, remained under the direct control of different indigenous groups. During the following decades, the native and Creole populations had their interactions, and their conflicts increased" (PASSETTI, 2018, p. 60).

These indigenous populations lived primarily from agriculture, hunting and crafts and established routes – *rastrilladas* – through which they maintained trade with the Creole cities: however, “the main intersection points between these routes, through which people, products and ideas travelled, were the target of disputes between indigenous families, as well as the target of constant attacks by Spanish and later Argentine military personnel” (PASSETTI, 2018, p. 60).

The indigenous population of southern Argentina had a very close relationship with the criollos: the latter, despite only sporadically dedicating themselves to agriculture and livestock, when it came to trade, were a serious competitor of the criollos in the dispute for livestock markets: “cattle, horses and sheep raised in the pampas were often sold to Chile, Bolivia and Peru and this was one of the most active and profitable economic activities of the period” (PASSETTI, 2018, p. 60).

Figure 2: *Main indigenous cacicados in the areas referred to*



Source*: (Passetti, 2018, p. 60)*

It is also important to note that "in addition to raising their own animals, they [caciques] fought with the Creoles over wild cattle - called *cimarrón* - but they also continued to invade livestock areas to carry out cattle theft. The invasion of Creole lands by the indigenous people was called *malón* and its members, *maloneros*." (PASSETTI, 2018, p. 60-61). This activity was rather important since it provided food for the indigenous populations, as well as other essential products "for trade and guaranteed the strength and importance of the chiefs and other warriors of the group. Among the Creoles, the image of the invasions of estancias, towns, and cities spread and became symbolic of Pampean relations and the so-called 'desert'" (PASSETTI 2018, p. 61).

1. Indigenous people and Creoles in the Arauco-Pampeano-Patagónico Complex in the 2nd half of the century. XIX

From a political and sociological perspective, 1861 is a pivotal year because it marks a significant shift in the previously established paradigm, as the triumph of the Buenos Aires militias over the Confederation led to the country's unification the following year. Passetti is blunt in stating that the significance of this event, "linked to

the institutional political history and the disputes between Creole groups, is even greater when one considers that the indigenous people were active—though not formal—participants in politics, and that the new power holders were their fierce adversaries" (PASSETTI 2018, p. 58).

This new sociopolitical reality was the breeding ground from which local leaders, both Indigenous and Creole, emerged, prospered, and clashed in the struggle for power and influence. Therefore, a "contact zone" was created to "populate" the lands forgotten by colonization, especially in southern Argentina: "in addition to the Indigenous people who occupied northeastern Argentina, in the Chaco region, various groups of Indigenous people occupied the Pampas and Patagonia, south of the regions occupied by the Creole populations, or the descendants of the Spanish who populated the American territory" (CARVALHO SEIXLACK & GUTIERREZ POMPEU, 2017, p. 1).

In this context, southern Argentina constituted, from a sociological point of view, a hybrid space, inherited from past centuries, where the coexistence of indigenous peoples and criollos deepened in the 19th century: "it was a 'frontier space' due to the large movement of indigenous peoples and criollos who coexisted in more complete ways than the opposition generated by the conflict. It was a space composed of criollo forts, villages, and farms, fluidly marking the 'limits' of the country's occupation, with the areas of indigenous domain" (NACUZZI, 2010, 11).

Since the unification of the country, relations between Indigenous peoples and Creoles in southern Argentina have been marked by constant "rapprochement and separation, accommodation and confrontation, resistance and combat" (Bechis, 2017, p. 1). Whenever Indigenous peoples saw their interests being harmed, they reacted and "imposed limits." These "limits" were perceived by both Creoles and the state as "borders within borders," and it was this perception that "legitimized" not only the ideology of occupation but also the organization of military offensives:

The diplomatic relationship, not always conflictual, established between indigenous people and Creoles in border areas was progressively rendered unviable by the development of “ideologies of occupation,” which sought to substantiate and legitimize the organization of military offensives aimed at incorporating the Pampas and Patagonia into the jurisdiction of emerging national states (SEIXLACK & GUTIERREZ POMPEU, 2017, p. 5).

According to Bárbara (2007), a correlation can be established between two variables: the increase in violence in the Pampas is directly proportional to the decrease in wild cattle, ultimately leading to their extinction. With the rise in the Creole population, wild cattle began to be raised on farms to prevent the Indigenous people from capturing them, as they had always done. The Creoles thus established a trade network that supplied the Indigenous communities, which could not do without cattle:uma rede de comércio indígena que se iniciava no Pampa, abastecia parcialidades indígenas igualmente dependentes desses animais, e que habitavam o outro lado da cordilheira dos Andes, na região da Araucania. Assim, o comércio de animais realizado pelos indígenas era responsável por conectar o Pampa, a Patagónia e a Araucania (Carvalho Seixlack & GUTIERREZ POMPEU, 2017, p. 3-4).

This climate of dialogue and understanding between indigenous people and Creoles in the border areas was gradually weakened and consequently compromised, not only by the scarcity of cattle, but also by the development of "ideologies of occupation," which sought to legally and morally legitimize future offensive military interventions, with the strict purpose of subjecting the Pampas and Patagonia to the jurisdiction of the national State in the gestation of tellerias (Carvalho Seixlack & Gutierrez Pompeu, 2017, p. 5).

It is important to note that a large part of these contracts was written by captive or refugee Creoles and literate Indigenous people, who not only wrote, but also explained and read the contents of the treaties to their respective communities:

> Given the interest in knowing the degree of agreement between what was stated in the documents (the writing) and what they actually sought to communicate (the sender's intention), the documents were repeatedly read aloud in the presence of literate individuals, often infiltrated in the tellerias (CARVALHO SEIXLACK & GUTIERREZ POMPEU, 2017, p. 5).

2. The formation of the National State and the "Ideology of Occupation"

The formation of a national state anchored to the idea of a civilizing project was, from the outset, the greatest challenge faced by indigenous people A state whose grand project was the creation of a society inspired by European models represented a serious threat to the existence of indigenous communities, at least as an autonomous entity with its own identity (Bechis, 2010, p. 171). Argentina had shed its colonial regalia in 1816,

but had not yet donned the garb of a civilized country. Therefore, the governments that succeeded Rosas felt there were no more excuses for postponing this decision and that the time had come to undertake this enormous state, national, and civilizing project. The generation of the eighties, a group of citizens who became prominent that year, including some foreign citizens, played an important role in raising political awareness. Di Tella characterizes this generation in detail, mentioning the name and role of each member; he also remarks on the involvement and contribution of foreign citizens to the formation of Argentina's new political leaders (DI TELLA (2010, p. 83-94). The new group in power was especially focused on those chieftains who were once formally associated with the Argentine Confederation:

> The intense correspondence exchanged between the tellerias and Urquiza's military was a hallmark of political relations between indigenous people and criollos in the period (...). Calfucurá, despite being officially allied with Urquiza, still maintained certain contacts with the porteños, receiving cattle and gifts in exchange for supposed neutrality (Passetti, 2009, p. 126).

The construction of the Argentine national state was profoundly influenced by caciquismo. During the "Generation of the 1980s," the political elite sought to consolidate central power, facing resistance from local caudillos and caciques. The roquista system, based on the alternation between revolution and agreement, was marked by negotiations and conflicts with regional leaders (DI TELLA, 2010, p. 83).

One of the most important measures which supported the process of consolidation of the Argentine State was the definition of borders and the effective occupation of the entire territory, which “was intrinsic to the project of constructing a statute of nationality and identity, in addition to the affirmation of belonging to this territory in the face of other nations, which within a Eurocentric parameter, considered the areas dominated by non-Western societies as “no man's land” (CARVALHO SEIXLACK & GUTIERREZ POMPEU, 2017, p. 12). It was in this context that Indigenous communities began to be targeted, whether through legislative measures, including the curtailment of treaties, or through more aggressive measures, including military interventions, always with the aim of clearing and occupying the "deserts." "In this context, scientific ideas were influenced, justifying military actions to confirm Argentina as a white nation, encouraging immigration and combating civilizational 'deserts." "The encounter of cultures in the frontier world became an impossibility: 'civilization' had to triumph over 'barbarism." The letter that Calfurá sent to the Minister of War, questioning the legitimacy of the reasons

and claims of the Creoles, is symptomatic, demonstrating that such claims leave the indigenous people landless, despite them being the true owners of the land:

> Escelentisimo señor tocante a la Poblasion de Cargue que nos dicen que es por sus órdenes en esto pido se resuelvan nosotros que somos dueño de esta America no es justo que nos dejen sin Campo pero espero que Usia se olvide de Cargue si es que an dado orden i si no lo an dado es mejor asi no me estiendo mas… (Carta de Calfulcurá para Martín de Gainza, 1873, Apud: OJEDA, 2008, 526).

It is clear that the process that presides over the encounter of cultures is, in this case, imposed acculturation: "despite the manifestation of opposition from Calfulcurá, Creole decisions from the second half of the 19th century onwards placed indigenous acculturation as the only form of survival" (QUIJADA, 2011, p. 126).

The circumscription of the territory is subsidiary to the delimitation of international borders and the abolition of the infamous "internal borders": these functioned as remnants of colonialism embedded in the territory under state jurisdiction, which in Creole terminology were presented as "deserts" or regions "on the margins of civilization". This terminology reveals the legitimizing purpose of expansionist movements and the assimilationist intent of state formation projects, civilizing the natives or eliminating them, if necessary.

If the leadership of the caciques over the indigenous communities of the Pampas and Patagonia was based on the feeling that linked these communities to belonging to an ethnic group and their place of origin, the Creole leadership had introduced, since colonial times, a new relationship with the territory, bringing about changes in various aspects of their worldview. However, the process of territorialization can never be understood exclusively as the subsidiary state intervention of some individuals and groups confined to certain geographic areas (CARVALHO SEIXLACK & GUTIERREZ POMPEU, 2017, p. 13).

The situation that arose forced society to change, leading indigenous people to redefine their identity and create new ways of making decisions and representing themselves, which had not previously existed, to adapt to new times and conditions. The rejection of the idea that contact between indigenous people and Creoles only occurred through the clash and confrontation between two closed cultures and the resulting appreciation of the numerous interactions between the agents involved allows, above all, the rewriting of history and the support of a new narrative in which the former - the

indigenous people - appear as decision-makers of their own choices and masters of their destiny (CARVALHO SEIXLACK & GUTIERREZ POMPEU, 2017, p. 13).

CONCLUSION

Before drawing any conclusions, we must begin by mentioning the limitations of this research: the first concerns the scope of the study, that is, the title "Caciquismo in the 19th and 20th Centuries" is too broad—it only covered the 19th century; the second limitation addresses aspects that were left unaddressed, namely: "The Rise and Fall of Caciquismo," "Caciquismo and Immigration," and "The Influence of Caciquismo on Contemporary Argentine Culture."

In the introduction to this research, we raised three questions, which we now revisit: What was the role of the caciques as an institution inherited from colonialism and representing indigenous peoples? How did caciquismo face the challenges of Argentina's independence? What changed after 1852?

To recap, and using the post-colonial triangle we presented in the introduction, it seems to us that it is possible to draw the following conclusions:

- Caciquismo was a complex social phenomenon with variable geometry: it involved a web of relationships between indigenous and Creole leaders and representatives of the State, in a complex network of alliances, conflicts, and negotiations;

- Indigenous caciquism, seen as a sign of resistance and aspiration for autonomy, was gradually suppressed by the strengthening of the national state, especially after the second half of the 19th century;

- The condemnation of caciquismo was present among intellectuals and reformists, especially in the so-called “generation of the eighties”, who considered it one of the main obstacles to the political and social modernization of Argentina;

- The construction of the National State was closely linked to the “ideology of occupation” and the “abolition of internal borders”, which guided the consolidation of central power over indigenous territories and communities

When considering this work as finished, we do so with the awareness that it must be further explored, particularly regarding the limitations previously mentioned.

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