



WHO BELONGS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MEXICO? A FICTIONAL MODEL FOR SCHOLARLY COMMUNITIES AND VICEREGAL VASSALAGE IN *TARDES AMERICANAS*

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Introduction

When Juan Antonio de Ahumada wrote a complaint to the king in 1725 from Mexico, his principal concern was why the Spanish monarchy had suddenly begun to alter its customary practice of rewarding loyal community members with leadership positions in their places of residence. Across the Spanish Empire, group membership constituted a central part of society. As such, subjects of the monarchy were understood not as individuals but rather in terms of local networks, meaning that social and political identities overlapped (Carzolio 658). Spanish vassals' integration was specific to a local territory; that is, although residents certainly owed their king loyalty, their most immediate devotion was to the community.¹ According to early modern practices surrounding community membership, integration came with the expectation that one would contribute to his community in return for certain privileges (Carzolio 690). Members, then, (or in Ahumada's words, "naturales") were subject to a system of privileges and obligations; in return for their loyalty, one such privilege was the right to hold administrative posts within the territory in question. Up until the eighteenth century, these positions of power were reserved for those who could best defend the community's interests: fully integrated vassals. What stimulated a change in the practices of belonging that Spain had depended upon for centuries, then? The answer lies in the political context of the era. The eighteenth century across the Spanish Empire, a century marked by the Bourbon kings' desire to tighten control over Spain's American territories, introduced significant changes. Among other political restructurings, Ahumada and his contemporaries witnessed the favoring of those vassals born in Spain, called *peninsulares*, for key posts in the Americas. By contrast, the sons of Spaniards born across the ocean, called *criollos*, were increasingly distrusted to enact the king's will in viceregal territories, and American-born

¹ Thompson writes that this focus on the community as the central unit to which subjects owe their loyalty takes its roots in Aristotelian theory, where the "community found its expression first of all in the city" (127).

subjects began to be treated as second-class citizens.² For Ahumada, sending bureaucrats from Spain to govern over the vicerealties was akin to giving strangers —people with no ties to the land— power over the future of the community. Frustrated by these unjust changes, Ahumada insisted that:

Con que por el derecho de España todos los empleos eclesiásticos, políticos, y militares de satisfaccion, confianza y fidelidad, deben darse á los propios, y no a los estraños. Y siendo esto asi, ¿por qué a los americanos no se darán los de Indias...? ¿Qué delito han cometido, para dejar de obtener los cargos que en toda la cristiandad, dice la ley, tienen los propios? (Ahumada 10)

Like other *representaciones* of the era, Ahumada's letter details the injustices that American-born subjects faced in viceregal territories (Robles 184). Throughout his letter, Ahumada bemoans the fact that Spaniards assigned to posts in the so-called New World arrived without familiarizing themselves with the places or the people over which they were to enact the king's will. For Ahumada, this ignorance was a violation of the laws and customs which had been used for centuries to determine who was considered native and who was considered a foreigner (*naturales* versus *extraños/extranjeros*). In his view, only natives should hold positions of power in America since "[d]iscrecion fue de nuestros sabios...fiar mas de los propios que de los estraños" (10). Due to the underlying political context, Ahumada's representation is a defense that *only* American-born vassals deserve the positions in question since they are the ones who possess the knowledge necessary to govern well (15, 21). Good governance, then, is set up as a product of integration into a territory, which historically equaled membership in that space.

Given its appearance early in the century, Ahumada's representation was one of the first defenses of *criollos'* right to hold ecclesiastical and secular posts (Robles 177). Yet others would follow in his footsteps, publishing defenses both in the same genre and others, such as the didactic dialogue. One such dialogue published closer to the end of the century was *Tardes americanas* (1778), authored by the Franciscan clergyman José Granados y Gálvez. Granados, although Spanish, had spent most of his life in New Spain. His identification with *criollos* is evident in the text, which lobbies for a future in which *criollos* are not treated as inferior citizens. He does this in several ways: by using irony to discreetly critique the political

² The term "criollo" originally denoted black slaves born in the Americas as opposed to those born in Africa, carrying a negative connotation. While the word was eventually applied to Spanish vassals born in the Americas, the negative connotation remained, signaling a supposed inferiority to those born in the metropolis, called "peninsular(es)" (Robles 6).

reformism in vogue, by presenting an homage to *criollo* intellect, and by expounding upon the history and historiography of his place of residence, Mexico. The genre that Granados chooses, the dialogue, is precisely what allows him to articulate a critique against state policies aimed at limiting *criollo* participation.³ That is, he is able to articulate his discontent by splitting the narrative voice into two main characters, one Spanish and one indigenous. Whereas the former, Español, represents “a set of incorrect ideas about the past and present of Mexico” (Robles 118), the indigenous character, Indio, voices Granados’ own perspectives.

Granados’ critique of the political currents in vogue during the last quarter of the eighteenth century is intimately connected to the topic I am interested in exploring in the present analysis: vassalage. In this article, I will examine how Granados expresses his own vision of viceregal vassalage in *Tardes americanas* or, in other words, how he defines loyalty to his place of residence. Focusing on the subject on vassalage will allow me to address how Granados’ work both dialogues with the political context and ultimately contributes to viceregal scholars’ efforts to vindicate Mexico’s reputation as a site of past and present intellectual production. Additionally, this focus reveals how Granados establishes Indio’s exemplary character as a model for vassalage. However, Indio is not necessarily a model in and of himself; rather, he represents *criollo* interests and as such portrays *criollos* as the best-suited candidates for positions of power within the viceroyalty. Indio is characterized by a remarkable intellect that ultimately signals loyalty to both a local community and to the monarchy. According to Spanish custom, it is these commitments which lead to good governance, hence Granados and his contemporaries appeal to a traditional understanding of sociopolitical membership in their political critiques. While the Bourbon reforms were partially aimed at redefining these relationships of membership, Granados’ critique is rooted in the practices of belonging already in place in the monarchy. Ultimately, Indio displays a scholarly commitment to Mexico which serves to implicitly protest the injustices that *criollos* were facing under the Bourbon administration. His commitment to Mexico can in fact be read as a symbol of *criollos*’ integration into the territory, which should have guaranteed them preferential treatment within viceregal structures of power.

As I see it, through this text Granados articulates a vision of belonging to the Mexican viceroyalty that represents an epistemological shift, albeit not unique to *Tardes americanas*, in ways of traditionally understanding loyalty to Spain. This shift, the outcome of which is the visualization of letters as service to the king, is in fact related to the marriage of various ways of understanding belonging within the Spanish Empire. While claiming

³ This genre in fact constituted a literary trope of the era, which was utilized in a variety of contexts to express indirect criticisms of the government (Weber 138).

territorial membership was a complex matter that involved several categories, in the viceregal texts examined in this article we can see a certain overlap in ways of expressing commitment to the monarchy and to one's community. In Indio's case, this commitment is intellectual. Although articulating scholarly production as loyalty to the king was not a new idea in the eighteenth century, during Granados' lifetime this idea took on particular importance given the underlying context. That is, it was a time when American territories faced attacks from Europeans who saw only barbarity in the New World. It was also an era of extreme political reformism, when the Bourbon kings intended to increase control over their far-off lands. Some of these reforms stemmed from distrust of American-born vassals; for these reasons, Granados articulates a view of vassalage that lobbies for *criollos'* well-merited participation in the administration of the viceroyalty while also contributing to the effort to situate Mexico within the Republic of Letters. Before delving into Granados and his contemporaries' disagreement with state politics, I will examine Indio's character through a focus on how sociopolitical membership was understood during this era. Said analysis will center on how Indio is set up not only as the voice of Granados' discontent, but also as a symbol of *criollos'* ideal vassalage. Indio, who has been read as a "strategically 'indigenized' *criollo*" (Robles 143), extensively praises *criollos*, who are at the heart of the dialogue's message. Additionally, his own knowledge of Mexico is connected to Granados' insistence that, according to traditional models for belonging, *criollos* were adequately qualified to hold posts in the viceroyalties.⁴ I read Indio's character as reflecting the ways in which *criollos* self-positioned themselves as those representing the best interests of the viceroyalty due to their first-hand knowledge of the spaces in question. For this reason, Indio's character weighs in on the political balance of power within the viceroyalty and portrays *criollos'* commitment to the development of a viceregal literary sphere, the external proof of their loyalty to their places of residence. As such, Granados' political critique is articulated through Indio, who presents *criollos* as worthy of the positions of power that they were being denied under Bourbon rule.

Indio: Intellect as a Symbol of Integration

⁴ Granados presents the true (*verdadera*) history of the New World as a collaborative effort involving both *criollo* and indigenous voices; in this sense, I agree with Robles when he defines Indio as representative of a pact between indigenous and *criollo* populations (118). Robles additionally suggests that an overlap between the identity of indigenous nobles and the *criollo* class formed a historical reality in the viceroyalty (122). According to his interpretation, this overlap ultimately indicates that Indio symbolizes the "strategically 'indigenized' *criollo*" as opposed to an indigenous person with *criollo* aspects (143).

In order to examine how Indio's character is constructed in Granados' text (and ultimately how said construction serves to extoll *criollos*), I will first give an overview of *Tardes americanas*. This text tracks the history of New Spain beginning in pre-Hispanic times up until the moment of publication at the end of the eighteenth century. The dialogue's primary characters are Indio (a character of Otomi descent) and Español, although there is also a third character, Cura, who serves as a scribe. The frame of the story, outlined in the introduction, consists of Cura and Español happening upon Indio,⁵ after which Indio and Español come to the agreement that they will begin to discuss Mexican history. After all, the work's extended title claims to give "breve y particular noticia de toda la historia indiana". In order to fulfill this task, the text is divided into seventeen sections, called *tardes* (afternoons), each one addressing a different topic related to the history and historiography of the New World. Throughout the work, Indio promotes Western values. He is characterized by his sincere Catholic faith and his extraordinary knowledge of New Spain. Indio also staunchly defends *criollo* scholars, in this way embodying a veiled critique of the Bourbon government's focus on limiting American participation in the viceregal system. Español, however, supports these reformist measures and, in between indicating when Indio can begin and end his historical narrations, repeatedly doubts and counters all that Indio tells him. While Español reacts to Indio's narration, the latter is the true source of knowledge in this text (Gil Amate "Aproximación" 184): Indio's knowledge is informed by both indigenous and Western influences, since he has "procurado saber, no solo por los libros y autores, sino por la inmemorial tradición que de padres á hijos en mis antepasados se ha conservado".⁶ He is in charge of informing Español about Mexico's past, a pretext which leads him to glorify the little-recognized intellect and civility of his indigenous ancestors before ultimately—and key to the present analysis—praising *criollos'* talents.

A large part of Indio's discourse is aimed at showing that his ancestors could boast of civilized traditions; he seeks to vindicate the unlearned reputation that his people have been attributed, and he explains how even the Spaniards learned from indigenous inhabitants upon arrival in the New World. Granados' aim here is not unique, as much viceregal scholarship in the eighteenth century was dedicated to proving that the Americas, just like Europe, could boast of a developed intellectual past despite the lack of a Westernized alphabet. For Granados and Ahumada, textual attempts to portray Mexico as the site of innovative scholarship were articulated via the binary of ignorance versus familiarity. That is, viceregal scholars criticized European writers who spoke ill of Americans' intellectual capacities without

⁵ The pages of the introduction are unnumbered.

⁶ Quoted from the introduction.

ever setting foot in the New World. *Criollo* writings intended to correct such ignorance by proving that viceregal scholarship equaled its European counterparts. On the other hand, the subject of unfamiliarity is intimately connected to that of vassalage, as community membership was dependent upon integration into a specific territory (a topic that I will discuss in the next section). Since unfamiliarity signaled lack of membership, within Granados' dialogue, Indio's historical knowledge can be understood as proof of sociopolitical belonging. In fact, *criollos'* arguments (such as Ahumada's) that *peninsulares* shouldn't receive viceregal posts stemmed from the latter's unfamiliarity with the territory which they came to govern.

Robles proposes that efforts to vindicate *criollo* knowledge correspond to a desire to situate New Spain as a new center in the so-called Republic of Letters (102). This insight is key to the present discussion in recognizing how the pre-Hispanic past is held up as the symbolic groundwork for the intellectual grandeur that the *criollos* would later establish (104). Said effort is exactly what we see in *Tardes americanas*. That is, in the first half of the dialogue Indio dedicates much effort towards establishing the validity of his ancestors' intellectual capacities, yet he hardly mentions the indigenous peoples of the present moment. While Granados and his viceregal contemporaries portrayed Mexican antiquity as paralleling European antiquity, the drive behind such discussions lay in establishing the basis for present-day *criollo* scholarship and, in the reformist context of the eighteenth century, defending the rights of American-born subjects. In *Tardes americanas*, Indio focuses his narration on the topic of intellect by validating both his ancestors' intellectual abilities and those of contemporary *criollos*. In fact, the cultivation of "letters" in the eighteenth century was often portrayed as denoting commitment both to the monarchy as a whole and to the political health and stability of the viceroyalties. In this sense, Indio's emphasis on American subjects' intellectual capacities is connected to the ways in which viceregal scholars during this era portrayed their academic productions as a loyal service to the king, patron of their endeavors. For example, a Representation written in 1777 by members of the Real y Pontificia Universidad de México aligns the university's endeavors — "[e]l incremento de las letras" — with the state's interests, defining the two as mutually beneficial (Tanck de Estrada 73). The same alliance between literary production and good governance is found in *Tardes americanas*, as Indio speaks of letters as a means of honoring the king. Yet at heart, Indio's character represents how knowledge serves as proof of membership within a community. In this way, he incarnates the exemplary behavior explicitly attributed to *criollos* by scholars who freely spoke out against the Bourbon reforms. Ultimately, this behavior signifies aptitude to fill leadership positions within the viceroyalties. As I will discuss in the following section, in Granados' work said aptitude is linked to a traditional understanding of vassalage and is therefore a result of integration into the Mexican viceroyalty. Before exploring how Indio frames the cultivation of

letters as a service to the king, I will examine how the concept of sociopolitical membership was understood during this era, followed by discussion of the political context within which Granados wrote. In this way, we will be able to better see how Granados' critique is connected to the epistemological shift in ways of understanding vassalage (that is, as both service to the monarchy *and* connection to a community) presented in *Tardes americanas*.

Defining Belonging in the Spanish Empire

In beginning to examine historical representations of belonging to a geographic territory within the Spanish Empire, we do not find clear-cut divisions regarding who could claim membership. Instead, trying to distinguish who could (not) claim belonging was a complex matter, in part because a variety of categories was used to classify inhabitants, including “vasallaje,” “vecindad,” and “naturaleza,” each denoting a different set of behaviors. Strictly speaking, vassalage referred only to a relation of subjection, whereas the other two were community-based practices. However, the word “citizen” (*ciudadano*) was not utilized to signify the relationship between king and subjects in this era. In Covarrubias' dictionary from 1611, the term “ciudadano” does not appear, and in the *Diccionario de autoridades* (volume II, 1729) it is defined as the “vecino” of a city, meaning someone who has established residence in a certain place and therefore is allowed to enjoy the privileges of residence while contributing to the community in return. This definition highlights the centrality of group membership in this era, a fundamental concept given that the absence of this type of belonging equaled living beyond the bounds of society. While *vecinos* were allowed to enjoy certain privileges, these were specific to one's community of residence, not the whole kingdom (Guerra 42).⁷ The responsibilities of the *vecino* included not only economic contribution, but also affective ties such as considering the wellbeing of the community over one's own (Carzolio 679). In other words, *vecindad* implied loyal commitment to a concrete territory. Similarly, throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, *naturaleza* came to be associated with a series of obligations and privileges within a specific kingdom, as well as a status of subjection to the king (like *súbdito/vasallo*). These privileges included the right to hold certain offices and conduct commerce in the Indies (Carzolio 653- 655). Returning to Ahumada's passage referenced at the beginning of this article, we can see that his insistence upon American “naturales” being those deserving of viceregal posts stems from this early modern understanding of community membership.

⁷ To be considered *vecino*, one needed to be an adult male, head of a family, and property owner (Carzolio 655, 668). For non-natives to achieve *vecindad*, they could either marry or request recognition from the authorities (668-669).

On the other hand, the term “vasallo” in Covarrubias’ dictionary denotes loyalty towards a landowner, whereas in the *Diccionario de autoridades* (volume 6, 1739) it signifies a relationship between a subject and his/her superior. Although rewards from the king were dependent upon loyalty and obedience, the concept of fidelity was also understood to have limits, hence vassals felt it within their rights to object to unjust orders from above (Gil 99). In the Americas, this understanding of vassalage is evident from the Conquest on, as conquistadors felt entitled to demand due rewards for their services (Pagden 53). In the eighteenth century, that same right to resist unfair treatment informed Ahumada and his *criollo* contemporaries’ demands that their loyalty deserved compensation. Granados’ more subtle critique presents Indio as someone who has demonstrated model commitment to his community through historical knowledge. Given that the aim of the dialogue is to venerate *criollos*, Indio’s exemplary loyalty can be understood as a reflection of how *criollos*, the object of his praise, deserve to be rewarded for their integration. In this way, Granados’ understanding of what constitutes good vassalage aligns with the membership practices that Spain had depended upon for years.

Speaking generally, in Spain’s past the concept of citizenship as we understand it today was determined by social practices articulated in terms of commitment to one’s community. Vogel writes that originally the principle of *jus sanguinis* had been most relevant in Europe, meaning that children inherited their parent’s nationality. However, the Latin emphasis on *jus soli* and *jus domicilii* determined that one’s membership became tied to his place of residence (Vogel 115-116). For this reason, commitment to local territories was increasingly emphasized throughout the Middle Ages. Herzog, who has written extensively about relationships of belonging in the early modern Spanish empire, indicates that sociopolitical membership in this era was a product of both “vecindad” (translated by Herzog as citizenship) and “naturaleza” (nativeness). Contrary to our modern understanding of citizenship, these categories of belonging were primarily social practices (Herzog, *Defining* 32).⁸ The *ius commune* law, with roots in Aristotelian theory, dictated that the desire to join a certain community was the only criteria necessary to do so (Herzog, *Defining* 24-25): as such, categories of belonging were judged by one’s behavior, which signaled proof of commitment to the community. In her book about Enlightenment culture and legal studies, Bianca Premo writes that when the Bourbons took the throne, legal culture began to undergo significant changes. Previously, inhabitants’ actions had been governed more by regional custom than by

⁸ However, this does not mean that formal declarations were never issued. In a small number of cases, these categories could be verified with formal procedures (Herzog, *Defining* 5). In Spain, this only happened in cases of “conflict or potential conflict” (Herzog 55).

written law, and what formal legal training did exist was informed by Roman law. However, during the eighteenth century, legal education was altered to reflect the Bourbon emphasis on promoting *Spanish* law (Premo 68-70). Even so, proof of commitment remained a requirement to claim community membership and, in the eighteenth century, *criollos* would call upon not only their birth in American territories, but also their integration into those spaces as justification for receiving the rights they were due. As in the case of scholars like Ahumada and Granados, this integration could look like intellectual production, where the cultivation of knowledge about one's place of residence signaled commitment to that space.

Now that we have established a base for understanding how categories of belonging functioned in the Spanish Empire, we can return to our focus on the eighteenth century and Granados' text. In the rest of this analysis, I will use the term "vassalage" in a more general sense than Herzog: I understand the term as signifying the loyalty of subjects to their king *as well as* commitment to one's community (the latter being what Herzog calls "citizenship"). The way I see it, the concept of vassalage can be understood as encompassing both types of allegiance given that intellectuals in Granados' era explicitly defined good governance as dependent upon familiarity with one's community, while also presenting their scholarship about viceregal territories —scholarship intimately rooted in first-hand knowledge of the territories in question— as honoring to the entire monarchy. Granados and his *criollo* contemporaries viewed community membership as stemming from local integration, which in turn was viewed as producing the conditions for the most effective political leadership. Alongside exploring Granados' vision of vassalage, in what follows I will examine *Tardes americanas* in conversation with other key texts of the era, and we will see that Granados implicitly presents the same line of reasoning that other defenses of *criollos* explicitly outline. Said reasoning is based on first-hand familiarity with the viceroyalty, which translates to proof of sociopolitical membership within local communities, a classification that should have guaranteed *criollos* access to viceregal posts.

Bourbon Reforms: Redefining Viceregal Vassalage

Exploring the political atmosphere in which *Tardes americanas* was written will help us understand the critique of limited *criollo* participation that Granados encodes in his text, as well as how Granados projects his own vision of viceregal vassalage in response to the political currents at play. In the era in which Granados wrote, the balance between public and private spheres was shifting. Whereas prior to the second half of the eighteenth century, Spanish state matters were a private affair that concerned only the king, the reformist measures put in place over the course of the century introduced a separation between private and public

spheres.⁹ In his article concerning the emergent public sphere in the New World, Piccato writes that the Bourbon reforms served as a type of momentum that allowed American vassals to express their complaints: “[w]hile in the past the rights of Creole and Spanish residents of American cities did not need to be defended publicly, those rights suddenly became the unifying theme of public discourse and the expansion of the periodic press” (171). This reality is evident in *Tardes americanas*, albeit in an implicit manner, as Granados opposes the measures taken to impede *criollos* from accessing high-ranking posts (Gil Amate, *Sueños* 185). If we return to Indio’s historical knowledge in this light, we can see that all the positive descriptions of Mexico’s indigenous past do not exist only to underscore the inherent value of said history. Rather, this focus is a strategy that allows Granados to articulate his complaints about the present. For this reason, historiography plays a utilitarian role in *Tardes americanas*. In fact, one of the censors of the text, Friar Joseph Arias, reports after reading the work that its purpose is not what it appears, a chronology of the Mexican past. Instead, the goal is to “abogar por los Indios Christianos en el tribunal de la Justicia y Misericordia; y exaltar con mil honores á los Criollos...destruyendo las falsas imaginaciones de la ignorante vulgaridad.”¹⁰ *Tardes americanas*, although indirectly, contributes to the growing possibility for public discourse by encoding disapproval within a historical narrative. In this way, the text is able to simultaneously vindicate the intellectual reputation of Mexico’s (indigenous) past and (*criollo*) present, ultimately privileging the latter.

The Bourbon reforms were not limited to viceregal territories, yet a large portion of the enacted measures focused on redefining the relationship between the metropolis and the viceroyalties so as to increase productivity and gain more benefit from the Americas. Fisher defines the high point of reformism in American territories as the strengthening of imperial defenses, the increase of revenue collections, and the introduction of free trade: in sum, measures aimed at centralizing the monarchical authority and assuring that the viceregal territories produced maximum economic benefit (28). In order to control Spain’s overseas territories, Carlos III (1759-1788) appointed loyal Spaniards to enforce “administrative, fiscal, military, and commercial changes” (Kuethe and Andrien, *The Spanish* 5). Granados’ relative, José de Gálvez, to whom *Tardes americanas* is dedicated, was one of those loyal bureaucrats tasked with enacting reforms in the Americas. Between 1765 and 1771, Gálvez served as General

⁹ To illustrate, the Bourbon government introduced the depersonalization of certain services, as well as measures to eliminate corruption and nepotism (Uribe-Uran 427-428).

¹⁰ Unnumbered pages preceding the introduction to *Tardes americanas*.

Inspector in New Spain, where he implemented drastic changes that tripled public revenues in Mexican commerce. Under his rule, taxes were increased, a monopoly over key goods was put in place, and a new system of “intendants” was enacted. These reforms produced significant benefit and, between 1793 and 1796, the Mexican viceroyalty produced more than 80% of the income that made its way to Spain from viceregal territories. In this way, Mexico essentially “financi[ó] la defensa de rutas marítimas estratégicas en el Caribe y mant[uvo] la real tesorería en Madrid” (Kuethe and Andrien, *El mundo* 350). Gálvez’s reformist strategies were undoubtedly aggressive, and ultimately, his “costoso y polémico programa reformista...resultó insostenible” (Kuethe and Andrien 355).

Given that his career focused on the American territories, Gálvez naturally had strong opinions about the much-debated *criollo* versus *peninsular* rivalry. In his work “Discurso y reflexiones de un vasallo sobre la decadencia de nuestras Indias Españolas,” Gálvez, whose stated object is the public good, suggests a series of reforms aimed at increasing trade as well as diminishing the power of the church. Later, he begins to talk about *criollos*, saying: “aunque creo que sería injusto privar a los indios sobrios de que obtuviesen semejantes empleos [key viceregal posts]...me ha enseñado la experiencia adquirida en el manejo de varios negocios que siempre convendría mucho colocarlos en audiencias bien distantes a su origen.”¹¹ He insists that, because there is so much partiality in the Indies, giving *criollos* viceregal posts is harmful and leads to disorder, as these vassals are concerned only with their own wellbeing and choose to disregard their obligations. Clearly, Gálvez did not believe that *criollos* should be given posts in the Americas; given this backstory, we can understand Granados’ dedication as insincere—an early indication of the veiled critique found in *Tardes americanas*. Within this historico-political context, the Bourbon reforms themselves can be interpreted as seeking to redefine vassalage. Whereas the king sought to protect his overseas territories by keeping *criollos* out of high-ranking positions, Granados offers his own creolized vision, symbolized through Indio, of how to define belonging to New Spain. He, like Ahumada, believes that vassalage should continue to function traditionally, with integration into a territory meriting just reward. Thinking back to the categories of belonging in force at this time, Indio’s knowledge, indicative of commitment to Mexico, symbolizes proof of *vecindad/naturalaleza* within that specific territory. This type of integration should have translated to *criollos*’ rights to receive benefits from the community, one of them being the right to access high-ranking administrative posts. Traditionally, *vecindad* came with the right and responsibility to be elected for local public offices; *vecinos* were those eligible

¹¹ Pages unnumbered.

for said posts (Domínguez y Company 716-717).¹² However, the Bourbon reforms sought to alter this understanding of vassalage by preferring peninsular bureaucrats for viceregal posts, people who were not *vecinos* of American territories since, arriving from Spain, they naturally could not claim integration into the space.

Although Granados was Spanish, he spent nearly his whole life in the Americas, and he identified with *criollos*. His discontent with government policies in force at the time centered on *criollo* rights. In the ninth *tarde*, this complaint against limited *criollo* participation is made explicit, yet it is the fifteenth *tarde* that is most essential to understanding his critique. This section addresses the “indole, genio, y talentos de los Españoles Americanos, y noticia de varios acontecimientos” (395). Indio lists out all the complaints that have been leveled against “*nuestro* Criollismo” (397, my emphasis) in order to refute them with an abundance of positive accomplishments.¹³ In *tarde* XV, Indio highlights the many abilities that *criollos* have demonstrated, emphasizing above all their intellectual aptitude: this section shows that *criollos* are divinely gifted in their ability to cultivate sciences and arts (Gil Amate, “¿Confiar en los criollos?” 22). Between pages 400 and 419, Indio names the *criollos* that he deems most worthy of attention, including Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Juan Joseph de Eguíara y Eguren, and Carlos de Singüenza y Góngora, to name just a few. He then compiles a list of all the disciplines in which *criollos* have excelled, after saying that “no hay facultad, ciencia, ó arte donde no se hayan distinguido con especial aclamacion de todo el Orbe los hijos de los Españoles de esta América Septentrional” (419). These sciences and arts include painting, sculpture, architecture, medicine, and law, although he admits that the one area where *criollos* do come up lacking is in military arts, an area Indio doesn’t consider necessary for effective governance (Gil Amate, *Sueños* 159). As remains evident, Indio is fervent in his defense of *criollos*, which is structured within the frame of the narrative as intending to convince Español, who believes that *criollos* “carecen enteramente” in scientific and military expertise (394). These sections of the dialogue are key in seeing how Indio’s praise of *criollo* talents encodes Granados’ implicit critique of state policies aimed at limiting *criollo* participation in the viceroyalty.

¹² As Carzolio writes, *naturaleza* and *vecindad* tended to overlap in practice (689). One proof of this is the fact that both categories were used to judge one’s ability to occupy local posts. As discussed in regards to the article’s opening quote, Ahumada appealed to the rights of “naturales” in his defense of *criollos*.

¹³ As regarding Indio’s use of the possessive adjective “our,” I agree with Gil Amate when she maintains that “el indio consider[a] una ofensa a su ‘Nación’ cualquier comentario negativo sobre los criollos” (*Sueños* 188).

Complaints about *criollos* being denied American posts are clearly visible in *Tardes americanas* given the extensive elegy of *criollo* talent and intellect, yet it was not a new issue when Granados wrote at the end of the century. As Bernabéu Albert has shown, this inequality was a principal source of complaint throughout the colonial period (15); indeed, dating from the middle of the seventeenth century, one finds defenses that American-born Spaniards deserved secular and clerical appointments (Brading 4). In Spanish custom, only natives (*naturales*) of a place were able to work there (Herzog, “Citizenship and Empire” 149). In regard to the viceregal territories, the same distinction of nativeness was used to determine who was eligible to emigrate to and trade in the Americas, although the transatlantic application of this custom was much more rigorous in the New World given the interest in protecting commercial monopolies (Herzog 152, 163-165). In this way, the debate about who had the right to hold certain positions of power—which gained particular force in the eighteenth century as *criollos* spoke out against the injustices they faced—was an issue dating back centuries. Community membership came with the expectation of responsibilities and privileges, yet “divine, natural, and positive law” dictated that integrated members (*naturales/vecinos*) should be chosen over foreigners to hold positions of power (Pagden 62). In fact, one of the initial motivations for a marked differentiation between *criollos* and *peninsulares* stemmed from *criollos*’ desire to not be associated with those who viewed the Americas as a mere source of personal profit (Brading 18). Thus, early on the *criollos* defined themselves as loyal members of their communities in opposition to those who did not come with the intention of meaningful integration. Because the American territories had enjoyed a largely autonomous state of operations before the Bourbons took the crown, there existed an elite *criollo* class already in positions of power, which served as impetus for the Bourbons to limit said power (Martínez 240-241). For these reasons, the eighteenth century would see a redefining of viceregal vassalage in the attempt to overturn the system of loyalty and rewards that had previously governed the relationship between kings, vassals, and their communities. *Criollos* in Granados’ era kept insisting that, according to the traditional customs, they did not deserve to be treated as second-class citizens. They often based their arguments upon having met the criteria of nativeness, which implied integration into the community—something the *peninsulares* could not claim. Historically, categories of belonging were kingdom and community specific, yet during the eighteenth century the Bourbons would try to promote just one *naturaleza* for all of Spain (Carzolio 654). One result of this desire to unite the monarchy was the sending of Spaniards to occupy viceregal posts and vice versa. However, in a Representation written in 1771, members of Mexico City’s local council rejected this attempt of unification. They wrote that although *peninsulares* were not complete foreigners in America, in the consideration of high posts they should be judged as such (Pagden 65). In other words, they protested

the changes in membership practices that the Bourbons championed. In *Tardes americanas*, Indio, someone who shows loyalty to Mexico, is representative of that same desire to maintain a traditional understanding of belonging, one which should favor *criollos* in matters of viceregal administration due to their integration into the spaces in question.

Letters in Service to the King

While his text follows a different genre than his predecessors, Granados did not pioneer defenses of *criollos* nor vindication of Mexico as an intellectual space. Among other works appearing in this century that fulfilled these goals, Mexican scholar Rivadeneira published his *Representación de 1771*, which was written during the last few months of Gálvez's visit to New Spain (Bernabéu Albert 54). This letter consists of a detailed and passionate vindication of why *criollos* deserve to hold viceregal posts. In his writing, Rivadeneira denounces the way that the Bourbon reforms worked to curtail *criollos*' ability to hold newly-created posts in Mexico (38). He even goes one step further, insisting that *criollos* should be favored over *peninsulares* (just like Ahumada). Rivadeneira describes *peninsulares* as full of vices and unworthy of holding power, delineating the reasons why they are not "útiles al público" (92). In his view, *criollos* had been unfairly judged as a result of being equated with indigenous reputations (Rivadeneira 114-115). Rivadeneira's biggest issue with awarding *peninsulares* these posts—again, just like Ahumada—centers on their lack of knowledge about the place where they arrive to work: "vienen a gobernar un pueblo que no conoce, manejar unos derechos que no ha estudiado, a imponerse en unas costumbres que no ha sabido, a tratar con gente que nunca ha visto" (97-98). In this way, his text is yet another framed around the thread of community membership. Rivadeneira's writing carries a tone of urgency: "¡Ojála y fueron éstos sólo temores y consideraciones teóricas, y no las llorásemos cada día en la practica!" (94). He ends his letter by insisting that what he requests is only fair (156). As we can see, Rivadeneira's opinions line up with Granados, yet the former articulates his critique directly while Granados opts for the more subtle form of a dialogue. Ultimately, though, Rivadeneira and Granados (not to mention Ahumada) both anchor their critiques in the fact that *criollos* are naturally the most knowledgeable in terms of American territories and inhabitants. It is this knowledge that allows for good governance. As such, these authors express a view of vassalage that privileges local knowledge and implies that the vassal who can best serve the state is one who is intimately familiar with his local surroundings, customs, and history.

Despite *Tardes americanas*' veiled nature, Granados expresses the same view of what constitutes exemplary viceregal vassalage as his contemporaries who write in different genres. In fact, Granados follows Ahumada's lead (among others) in framing *Tardes americanas* as a type of loyalty to the monarchy. At the beginning of his letter, Ahumada says that

“si no recurrieramos, como a V.M. recurrimos, se abandonára sin duda el apetito de las ciencias...[y] la patria careciera de sus debidos incrementos” (1). Then, towards the end, he closes with a similar theme: he portrays *criollos* as protectors of the “aumento de las letras” (36); in other words, he aims to show that if *criollos* do not receive the honors they deserve, the Empire’s intellectual reputation will suffer. In light of this focus, we see a proposal of service to the king enacted through intellectual production (of which *criollos* excel in the eyes of Ahumada and Granados). I view this picture of loyalty as a model for good vassalage: said model privileges knowledge of one’s place of residence, in this case the Mexican viceroyalty, as necessary for good governance. Not only this, but local knowledge was also explicitly projected as honoring the monarchy as a whole. In this context, viceregal scholarship can be viewed as the outcome of overlapping understandings of group membership. Good vassalage, denoting loyalty between a subject and his superior, is dependent upon the type of firsthand knowledge signaling integration into a community (*vecindad/naturaleza*).

Indio, who has cultivated vast historical knowledge of Mexico, also frames intellectual effort as a service to the monarchy. In *tarde XV*, Indio describes Carlos III as “Protector de las Ciencias,” comparing his orders with the wisdom of Solomon and stressing the importance that the king has given to cultivating intellectual endeavors (430-431). Immediately after, the reader encounters his descriptions of the many abilities of the *criollos*, who—albeit lacking in military skills—are more than able to defend the king, the Catholic faith, and the homeland (426). Robles has posited that with this statement, Granados frames “letters” as “another kind of arms” (188), that is, another way of showing loyalty to the king, who, as we just saw, Granados portrays as protector of intellectual efforts. I agree with Robles in that historical and historiographical scholarship is the key within this text to implicitly showing how *criollos* are more apt for American posts than Spanish candidates who are unfamiliar with the New World. We see this idea fleshed out in the entirety of *tarde XV*, which details *criollos*’ intellectual abilities, thereby highlighting how Granados envisions the relationship between viceregal subjects and their king as one stemming from commitment to the territory, evidenced in Indio’s example by historical knowledge. In other words, Granados implicitly paints a picture of American vassalage as stemming from intellectual endeavors which both prove *criollos*’ commitment to the territory and simultaneously situate New Spain within the Republic of Letters. The way that *criollo* subjects can honor their king is by their commitment to knowledge, hence their endeavors deserve to be protected. As we have seen, this knowledge is one that encompasses the pre-Hispanic history of the Americas (albeit through a Westernized lens) insofar as Indio’s knowledge of New World antiquity serves as a base for the *criollos* of the eighteenth century, his true focus. For Granados, letters are representative of loyalty to the king, and as such, the model that he presents of ideal vassalage is scholarly in nature—the good

viceregal vassal is one who cultivates knowledge. In this way, Granados privileges knowledge as proof of territorial integration, a proposal which stems from the norms governing community membership as well as the desire to vindicate the viceregal territories as a space of intellectual production.

In *Tardes americanas*, Granados positions his history as the “verdadera” version in comparison to others that had previously appeared. Said positioning stems in large part from his belief that writing the history of Mexico depends upon both indigenous and *criollo* collaboration. Within this context, Indio’s historical knowledge is not only proof of integration into the territory, but familiarity with Mexico’s indigenous and *criollo* past is also what enables him to decry the injustices that the Spanish brought against both his ancestors and the present-day *criollos*. Yet this knowledge is not an end in itself. Rather, it serves a political purpose. Literary works such as *Tardes americanas*, authored by *criollos* (or in Granados’ case, someone who identifies with *criollos*), are ultimately a type of honor and loyalty to the king. This loyalty to the monarchy is naturally compatible with commitment to a community, as the literary works in question are the product of first-hand integration. According to Granados and his contemporaries, this intellectual loyalty to both the king and one’s community is proof that *criollos* should be defended as loyal subjects of the crown, vassals who deserve to hold important viceregal posts. Read in conversation with other works of the era critiquing the same policies —works which targeted *peninsulares*’ unfamiliarity with the viceroalties as leading to ineffective leadership— Indio presents *criollos* as the ideal candidates for positions of power in the vicerealty and his own character is in fact a representation of their community membership.¹⁴ Ahumada’s more explicit argument that unfamiliarity leads to poor governance is implicitly repeated in *Tardes americanas*: the knowledge that Indio possesses is necessary for good governance, and his praise of *criollos* presents them as deserving of positions of power. For Granados, then, a robust academic sphere is the external sign of the loyalty of subjects who deserve to be rewarded for their efforts.

I understand Indio’s knowledge as proof of commitment to Mexico (corresponding to the concepts of *vecindad* and *naturaleza*) as well as loyalty to the monarchy (*vasallaje* in its most limited sense). As we have seen, these two categories constitute the ways in which territorial belonging was understood at this moment in the eighteenth century, when Granados and his contemporaries used the marriage of both connotations to portray American subjects as better-suited candidates for administrative posts in

¹⁴ Indio’s Western values can also be read as a model for indigenous subjects of the vicerealty. However, Indio’s exemplary nature is ultimately a product of *criollos*’ leadership and scholarship within New Spain, hence his character serves to highlight why *criollos* deserve to be rewarded for their loyalty.

their own communities of residence. Ultimately, this portrayal appeals to a traditional understanding of sociopolitical belonging. Although the Bourbons' reformism aimed to alter these relationships, *criollos* continued to defend their rights within the monarchy according to customary membership practices.

As examined in these pages, categories of belonging in the eighteenth century were primarily centered upon collective sociopolitical units instead of individual ones. This characteristic of viceregal society, with roots dating back to the Middle Ages, would not disappear immediately upon independence from Spain. Debates about citizenship in early Latin American republics were first concerned with matters related to collectivity (how to define sovereignty, the nation, representation) rather than with individual rights (Guerra 36). In this way, the citizen as he was first conceived shared many characteristics with the good "vecino" (47), a reality reflected in the ways that citizenship in Latin America depended upon meeting a series of requirements that proved ability to contribute to the community, such as holding a respectable job and not suffering any physical or moral defects.¹⁵ In this way, nineteenth-century citizenship sought to define the ideal member of the new nation not as an individual but as someone immersed in a social network (52). In this article, I have examined how *criollos*' complaints about unjust treatment were articulated as disapproval of the Bourbon government's desire to redefine the relationship between viceregal vassals and their king. Despite these attempts to shift the balance of power out of *criollos*' hands so as to safeguard control over the American territories, the primacy of group membership was not easily discarded. Ultimately, viceregal, monarchical forms of understanding belonging to a specific territory would play a key role in the development of the citizen in Latin American republics throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁶

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¹⁵ For example, Chile's first constitution from 1822 specified that citizenship could be suspended for physical or moral ineptitude, two categories that would supposedly limit the potential productivity of the citizen.

¹⁶ I am grateful to José Francisco Robles for his comments on an earlier version of this manuscript.

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