**J@RGONIA**
- ELEKTRONINEN JULKAISU
ISSN 1459-305X
Julkaisija: Helan tutkijat ry.
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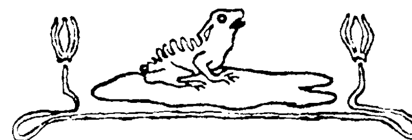

37/2021 http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:jyu-202108304690

# Conflicts in a Colonial Contact Zone: Violence, Coercion, and Mediation in Spanish-Indigenous Relations in the Sixteenth-Century *Gobernación* of Popayán

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*This article studies the conflicts between conquerors and conquered in the* Gobernación *(governorate) of Popayán (modern Colombia) in the second half of the sixteenth century. The conflicts were arguably part of a negotiation process between the different groups which played a significant part in shaping the colonial societies. The article also studies the attempts of the colonial bureaucracy to intervene in inter-ethnic relations, and transfer the negotiation process to the colonial institutions. The relationships were not fixed, as the interethnic dynamics constantly changed. The colonial contact zone was a place of negotiation, but also a place of struggle, where the indigenous subjects constantly challenged the conquerors' aspirations. Struggle and negotiation were not mutually exclusive as forms of interaction. Violence and threat of it were part of the negotiation process. The interethnic conflicts were a dynamic force through which the colonial society took shape. In this article, I use diverse source material from several colonial archives, including demographic, judicial, and administrative documents, looking especially for clues revealing indigenous agency in colonial society.*

**Keywords:** Spanish America; Popayán; *Audiencia de Quito*; Sixteenth century; Colonialism; Conflict; Indigenous peoples

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## Introduction

In 1554, the first bishop of Popayán, Juan Del Valle (c. 1500–1561), wrote a report on the state of the indigenous peoples in his diocese, painting a very desolate picture. According to the bishop, the country was more reminiscent of Babylon than the land of Don Carlos (Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and King Charles I of Spain), and the natives were more fatigued than the Israelites in Egypt. Del Valle accused the Spaniards of treating the indigenous peoples like slaves and of impeding the bishop's efforts to convert them. (AGI, Quito 78, no. 2, ff. 1r.–1.) Were interethnic relations there really as poor as the bishop's report suggests? Del Valle's descriptions of the violence against the indigenous peoples were based on his firsthand experiences, but one should not take his reports at face value. He was a champion of the rights of the natives and an opponent of most of the Spanish settlers, and his report reflects the cleric's condescending attitude toward the indigenous peoples. He was an advocate of peaceful evangelization under the tutelage of the Church and the Crown, and opposed to the strong autonomy of the *conquistadors*. (Friede 1961.) Therefore, his stories accounts were probably exaggerated, although there is enough evidence to show that interethnic violence was indeed widespread.

In this article, I study the conflicts between conquerors and conquered in the *gobernación* of Popayán (modern Colombia) in the second half of the sixteenth century. Interethnic interaction was both violent and peaceful, but I will concentrate especially on the conflictual side of it. The conflicts were arguably part of a negotiation process between the different groups which played a significant part in shaping the colonial societies. I will also study the attempts of the colonial bureaucracy to interfere in interethnic relations and transfer the negotiation process to the colonial institutions. The conflicts arose in local circumstances, and through these I will be able to gain insight into the local dynamics of interethnic relations during the early colonial period. Popayán was a frontier zone within the Spanish colonial empire. My aim in this article is to study the specific nature of the interethnic conflicts in a peripheral region where the imperial control was weak.

The traditional view of a rapid and total conquest of America and the complete subjugation of its native population has been utterly discredited in the past few decades. Recent historiography has shown that the indigenous peoples were not voiceless victims, but rather important actors and stakeholders in the colonial society building process. (Restall 2012, 151–160.) However, the focus on active indigenous participation has sometimes created a picture, probably unintentionally, of negotiation processes free from conflicts, which is equally erroneous. Violence and the threat of it were essential aspects in negotiations between the ethnic groups on the formation of colonial society. Conflict was a dynamic force through which this society developed, and on the periphery its role was emphasized, as the imperial institutions were weak and distant.

***Map 1.*** *Rough outline of the borders of the 16th century gobernación de Popayán with modern countries and cities. Base map: D-maps.com.*

The Spanish invasion created contact zones, a concept developed by Mary Louise Pratt, who referred to the “space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and

establish ongoing relations". These encounters involve coercion, inequality, conflict, and asymmetrical power relations, but the concept of contact zone helps us to look beyond the simple ideas of domination and separateness. It emphasizes the dialectic, interactive, and improvisational nature of these contacts, and the need for the various socio-political groups to coexist and communicate with each other. (Pratt 1992, 4–7.) In this article, I will examine Popayán as a contact zone on the frontier of the empire, where the Spanish presence was weak and their rule unconsolidated.

I start by looking at the development of colonial society in Popayán. After that, I will study three separate but interrelated themes; early colonial violence, the development of the colonial bureaucracy as an arena of negotiation, and the continuing warfare on the fringes of the *gobernación*. These themes overlap chronologically, but while violence dominated the decades immediately after the Spanish invasion, the bureaucracy later became stronger. However, outside the center of the *gobernación*, hostilities continued throughout the period of the study and beyond.

## Sources and Methodology

In this article, I use numerous archival sources from three different archives; namely the *Archivo General de Indias (AGI)* in Seville, Spain, the *Archivo General de la Nación (AGN)* in Bogotá, Colombia, and the *Archivo Central del Cauca (ACC)* in Popayán, Colombia. These include demographic, judicial, and administrative material.

Among the most important sources in this article are the *visitas*, inspections usually carried out by an experienced crown official, the *visitador*. Their function was to assess the situation in a certain region or institution, to intervene in possible malpractices, and ultimately to strengthen the rule of the central government in the area where the *visita* took place. In the sixteenth century, it was the most important institution in bringing Popayán under stricter rule.

The *visitadores* carried out a census of the indigenous population, determined their tributes, and reviewed the general situation of the indigenous peoples, their livelihood, and the treatment they received from the Spanish. In addition, they gave orders to the indigenous peoples, the Spanish settlers, the officials, and the clerics, and issued judgements on allegations of bad treatment. Therefore, the *visita* reports were very detailed and diverse, including censuses, information about the indigenous peoples' livelihoods, interviews with the Spanish settlers and the native Andeans, sentences, and observations made by the *visitadores*.

Another important group of sources are judicial documents. These include records of court cases on the maltreatment of natives as well as a case against an indigenous leader, Norindamo, for insurrection against the Spaniards. I also use letters and reports written by Spanish officials and clerics as well as the minutes of the city council of Popayán.

The role of legal institutions was very important in early modern Castile, [1] and the Spaniards started building the legal system in their colonies almost immediately after the conquest. For the indigenous peoples, this afforded a means of advancing their own interests within the colonial system (Mumford 2008, 5). According to Brian Owensby, the law represented a privileged space of interaction and a form of political engagement

for colonial peoples. Negotiation through imperial institutions was not only permitted, but also actively encouraged by Spanish officials and embraced by indigenous peoples. In a situation of recognized inequality, the law provided a means through which more vulnerable subjects could contest power. (Owensby 2010, xii–xiv.)

The courts were rarely the first resort in resolving conflicts. Often both parties to a certain dispute used other means at their disposal as well, such as violence, persuasion, and various forms of passive resistance. However, it seems that both sides generally invested plenty of time and effort into processing their cases in the courts, so it was definitely deemed important. The documents resulting from these cases illustrate the ways in which indigenous communities adapted to and challenged colonial rule. At the same time, careful reading of the documents reveals much about social relations, about power struggles, and about the formation of local networks.

The source material was produced by and for the purposes of the conquerors, and is inseparable from the colonial state-building process. The administration of the worldwide empire was made possible through a far-flung network of correspondence, the legal system was based on written documents, and the notaries were instrumental in the empire's bureaucratic machine (Rappaport & Cummins 2012, 113–114). Therefore, a large part of the colonial archives was a result of what Nicholas Dirks calls the metropole's ethnographic imperative to know the colonized peoples. The ethnographic archive was for the colonial bureaucracy the principal means of governing its subjects. These archives have subsequently become the principal source for historians studying colonized peoples. What we can find in the archives is determined by the contemporary needs of the colonial empire. (Dirks 2002, 59–61.)

There are no indigenous authored sources from sixteenth-century Popayán. Some documents contain indigenous voices, but these are invariably distorted. Therefore, there is no direct access to the indigenous point of view. However, it is possible to elucidate the native agency through these documents. I use as diverse source material as possible, compare sources against each other, and look for clues that I can follow and combine to form a larger picture.

However, it is also important to develop a decolonial reading of the documents. Gonzalo Lamana identifies two major narrative strategies of subalternization that the Spaniards used: exotization and erasure. Exotization makes the other particular and therefore inferior, while the conqueror remains universal and superior. Erasure renders the Spanish way of making sense the only intelligible way, implicitly condemning other ways of thinking as nonsense. Responding to only one of the colonial mechanisms of subalternization may actually serve to reinforce the other. Stressing similarity to counter exotization can support the idea of Western universality, while stressing difference to counter erasure can end up supporting exotization. Therefore, Lamana suggests a double narrative move: reintroducing cultural difference while simultaneously de-Occidentalizing the conquerors, that is, questioning their universality as a way of avoiding the risk of Orientalizing the natives. (Lamana 2008, 5–6.)

## The Creation of a Colonial Society in Popayán

The *gobernación* of Popayán was located in the western part of present-day Colombia, extending from the Colombian-Ecuadorian border until the *departamento* of Antioquia. The main Spanish towns in the *gobernación* were Pasto, Almaguer, Popayán, Cali, Cartago, Anserma, and Santa Fe de Antioquia. It was an ethnically and linguistically extremely diverse region north of the frontiers of the old Inca Empire, or *Tawantinsuyu*. There were over 60 ethnically distinct indigenous polities in the region, most of whom lived in the Cauca region. The ethnic groups of the region actively waged war against each other with the aim of expansion and acquisition of slaves, and some of them had paramount lords, whose domains extended over other lords and principals. In addition, the native societies of the region were intensively involved in trade, and the different polities were connected with long trade routes containing bridges and stone roads, which impressed the Spaniards. (Villamarín & Villamarín 1999, 595–598.)

It is impossible to provide any exact figures for the region's indigenous population at the time of contact because their depopulation due to the newly introduced diseases brought by the Spaniards was so sudden, and the first censuses were carried out only decades later. Hermes Tovar Pinzón, who spent decades studying Colombia's colonial demography, has estimated that the entire indigenous population of the Colombian Western Andes was about three million (cited in Villamarín & Villamarín 2003, 109–110). However, this is only an educated guess although it is based on extensive work on the available sources. When the *visitador* Tomás López (c. 1521–1574) undertook a census of the tribute paying (adult men) population of the *gobernación* in 1558–1559, it amounted to just 71,016 (AGI, Quito 60a). If accurate, this means that the entire population of the region, including women, children, and the elderly, would have been somewhere between 210,000 and 350,000. [2]

The Pastos and the Nasas, also known as Paeces [3], serve as good examples of the different levels of political organization in the *gobernación*. The Pastos had formed village federations, in which several settlements were grouped under a single leader, who exercised authority over the other leaders. It seems that there was a strong sense of ethnic unity, and different Pasto federations were on friendly terms with each other. The office of chief was hereditary, and they probably collected some sort of tribute from their people. (Calero 1997, 36–38.) By contrast, the Nasa (Paez) chiefs exercised only very restricted political authority, which was based on the popular consensus. There was probably some kind of hierarchy among rulers based on kin ties, but the chiefs were more arbitrators than rulers, and their duties were mainly ceremonial. Only during wartime did they take decisions concerning the whole community, and generally they were subject to the whims of their followers. It seems that chiefs did not gather tribute, nor did they have a redistributive function, as the chiefs of Pasto or the Cauca valley had. The settlement pattern was dispersed. (Rappaport 1990, 30–36.) The pre-colonial Nasas (Paeces) did not have chiefs in the common sense of the word, as nobody exercised authority over the people in all situations. The political authority was restricted to certain situations, in which the chiefs were elected ad hoc. (Quiroga 2009, 187.)

***Map 2.*** *Ethnic Groups of Colombia ca. 1500. Source: Villamarín & Villamarín, Native Colombia, 122.*

The Spanish conquistadors invaded the region of Popayán from the south in 1535. During the succeeding years, the Spaniards pushed further into the interior and founded several cities, including Pasto, Popayán, Cali, Anserma, and Cartago. By the 1540s, the Spanish presence in the area was established, and a colonial society had emerged. Large parts of the area remained unconquered for long after that and Spanish control in some of the conquered areas was precarious, but it was clear that they were there to stay. (Melo 1996, 159–184.)

The Spanish conquerors of Popayán were experienced men of the Indies. They were led by Sebastián de Belalcázar (d. 1551), [4] who had been in the New World for over twenty years, possibly almost thirty, and who had been among the leaders in the conquest of Peru. (Lockhart 1972, 123–124.) When the Spaniards invaded new areas the expedition members were usually men who had already taken part in previous conquests, which created a relay system of conquest. Some of the conquistadors stayed put, but others were recruited for new expeditions, ensuring that men with previous experience in conquests always took part in them. (Restall 2003, 33.) Another feature typical of these conquests was the important role of the indigenous allies. Probably several thousand indigenous allies originating from Quito, Peru, and elsewhere accompanied the couple of hundred Spanish conquistadors. (Matallana Peláez 2013, 21–28.) In addition to that, wherever they went, the Spanish invaders always looked as soon as possible for as many local indigenous allies as they could recruit. (Restall 2003, 23.) This was the strategy followed in Popayán.

Popayán became a quasi-independent *gobernación* within the viceroyalty of Peru, which was founded in 1542. It was not part of the system of *corregimientos*, which were the standard administrative units in the viceroyalty of Peru. These governorates were usually located in the more remote or isolated areas and they usually had a military character, as some of the local indigenous groups did not recognize Spanish authority. (Phelan 1967, 165–166.) Viceroys were the supreme representatives of the crown in the colonies. The viceroyalty of New Spain (Mexico) was established in 1535, and the viceroyalty of Peru in 1542. In mainland Spain, the administration of the overseas possessions was handled by the *Consejo de Indias* (Council of the Indies) acting on behalf of the king. (See Ijäs & Uusitalo 2017, 160.)

In 1550, Popayán became a part of the royal *audiencia* (high court) of Santafé de Bogotá, but the *audiencia's* control over the area remained relatively weak. In 1563, another royal *audiencia* was founded in Quito, and the southern, more populous parts of the *gobernación* were incorporated into it. This strengthened imperial control somewhat, but the *gobernación* retained much of its independence throughout the sixteenth century and beyond.

Popayán was in several senses a peripheral region within the Spanish colonial empire. Many of the Spaniards held the Inca Empire in high esteem because of its complex organization, and regarded the areas that had not been part of it as more uncivilized and barbaric. The Spanish chronicler Pedro Cieza De León describes the inhabitants of the *gobernación* as primitive, stubborn, and untamed. According to de León, this is because there had been no masters to inspire fear among the people, and therefore they would serve whom they pleased, unlike the natives of Peru, who were accustomed from birth

to serving the Incas. (Cieza de León 1553, ff. 15v.–16r.) Popayán was also far away from the centers of colonial power, and inaccessible due to the lack of roads and the difficulty of the terrain. The social structure of the indigenous communities was less complex than in Peru. The Spaniards were few and far apart in a hostile environment. All this meant that the *gobernación* was peripheral both physically and mentally from the Spanish point of view. It was more difficult to control and more difficult to understand than the central areas of the former *Tawantinsuyu*.

Spanish-indigenous relations in the early colonial society were organized through the system of *encomienda*. This was an institution developed to control the indigenous people and their labor in the colonial period and to reward the conquistadors. It meant that a certain group of natives, usually the subjects of a certain *cacique* [5] (indigenous chief), had to pay tribute to their *encomendero*. The *encomendados* (natives entrusted to the *encomendero*) were not the property of the *encomendero*. They were free men, but they had an obligation to work and pay tribute. Because of its importance and its exploitative nature, the *encomienda* was at the center of many interethnic conflicts. The most common reasons for the conflicts were tied to indigenous (forced) labor and the excessive demands of the Spanish *encomenderos*. (Uusitalo 2021, 62–63, 104–117.)

The *encomiendas* were not geographically determined territories, but administrative units each consisting of a *cacique* and his subjects. The role of the *cacique* was central as he was subjected to a Spanish *encomendero* and it was through him that the natives were entrusted to that *encomendero*. (Trelles Aréstegui 1991, 269.) This arrangement meant that the personal relations between encomendero and cacique determined how the institution of *encomienda* functioned. The *encomienda* system was based on quasi-feudal personal relations, and was largely beyond crown control, at least in the peripheral areas. The *encomenderos* often resorted to violence to extract as much profit as possible from their *encomendados*.

In much of Spanish America, the *encomienda* system was quite short-lived. Most of the *encomiendas* of Mexico and Peru reverted to the crown and by the 1570s the institution had lost its significance. However, on the peripheries the *encomienda* persisted for much longer, and in Popayán, it remained important into the seventeenth century. (Bakewell 1997, 193–196; Burkholder & Johnson 2001, 117–120.) The institution of *encomienda* was prone to unsustainability. Indigenous mortality was high in any case, and the hard work for the *encomenderos* further reduced the population. Because the *encomiendas* were generally inheritable only to the second generation, the *encomenderos* had no interest in the welfare of the people placed under their care. Instead, they were after a quick profit, often to pay off the debts incurred by their expeditions against the natives. Nevertheless, the *encomienda* proved to be a resilient institution in the frontier zones, due at least in part to the social and cultural capital attached to the title of *encomendero*. The *encomenderos* formed the political elite of the local societies, which meant that the institution continued to be important even as its economic value decreased. The central authorities, on the other hand, relied on the *encomenderos* in the back country, where indigenous uprisings were a constant threat. (Lane 2000, 73–83.)

## Early Colonial Violence

In 1552, the bishop of Popayán, Juan del Valle, carried out a *visita* (inspection) among the peoples of the *gobernación*. During the *visita*, del Valle listened to the natives' grievances about crimes perpetrated against them by the Spaniards. Many of the *caciques* had complaints about their *encomenderos*. Some of them complained that their *encomenderos* forced every working aged man to work in the mines or in their estancias, so that there were not enough people to till the fields of their own communities. Others claimed that they had been whipped and humiliated for not being able to give their *encomendero* as much gold as he demanded. The Spaniards' greed for gold emerged several times during del Valle's *visita*. The main villain in the report seems to have been Sebastián Quintero, one of the leading *encomenderos* in Popayán. According to many native witnesses, he traveled around the villages of his *encomienda* determined to find the gold he assumed the natives were hiding. When they said they had no gold, Quintero had them tortured, and often finally killed. (AGI, Justicia 1118b, no. 2, ramo 6.) [6]

Complaints over these same issues were extremely common throughout the colonial era, and especially during the first few decades. In early colonial society, violence between natives and Spaniards was recurrent. Research has recently focused more on the co-operative side of interethnic encounters, but this does not mean that violence did not occur. As Murdo J. MacLeod states, the Spanish American colonial system was structurally attuned to violence, but much of this violence remains hidden. After the initial period of conquest, there were only a few indigenous insurrections or large-scale violent actions against the indigenous people by the Spaniards, but there were many forms of daily violence, often more on the peripheries. (MacLeod 1998, 142.)

Inter-ethnic violence is often underemphasized in research because it was underreported, and was only documented when brought before a court of law (MacLeod 1998, 130–134). However, there are many documents suggesting that such violence was endemic. A criminal action brought against Marcos Castuera, an *encomendero* from the town of Anserma, illustrates the situation quite well, as it contains several elements typical of inter-ethnic relations in early colonial Popayán and other similar regions. The court hearing took place in 1552, but the incidents had occurred many years earlier in the 1540s. [7] According to the charges, Castuera had maltreated the natives of his *encomienda* in many ways, among them imprisonment, torture, robbery, and killings. In addition, he was accused of being responsible for the death of three *caciques*, Tanzarara, Quycantro, and Cabraminima. The first was allegedly murdered, the second hanged after a dubious bogus trial, and the third committed suicide while being held prisoner. (AGN, Caciques e indios 37, doc. 13, hojas 572r.–575r., 609r.–610v., 718r.)

Castuera denied all the charges, but despite his protest, the *audiencia* of Santafé found him guilty. He was sentenced to forfeit his *encomendados* to the crown and to exile from Anserma for three years. Castuera maintained his innocence and demanded that the verdict be overturned but instead, the *audiencia* increased Castuera's punishment to exile for life. In addition, Castuera was exiled from the city of Santafé for one year. (AGN, Caciques e indios 37, doc. 13, hojas 683., 736r.)

This was a criminal case brought to court by the crown prosecutor several years after the incidents. The case was handled by the *audiencia* of Santafé, and one of the reasons it was not brought to court earlier was that the *audiencia* was not founded until 1550. However, the court case was just one incident that reveals one aspect of the local power struggles. In the disputes between factions of the local society, it was very common to invoke atrocities committed against the natives by the other party; as such abuses were extremely common, this was always something that could be used against one's enemy. (Gamboa 2010, 273.) Marcos Castuera may not have been any more cruel than the other *encomenderos* at the time, and concern for *encomendados* is unlikely to have been the sole or even the main motivation for supporting the case against him. Nevertheless, there is no reason to assume that the conflicts between Castuera and his *encomendados* were not real.

The use of violence by Castuera and his peers was an attempt to show their power and strength, and to ensure they were feared. Both Castuera's case and those brought by the indigenous communities on Del Valle's *visita* involve public humiliation of the *caciques* in front of their subjects, which clearly challenged their authority and ability to protect their people. The *encomenderos* were outnumbered in an unfamiliar and often hostile environment facing a constant threat of indigenous rebellion. Violence was a means of asserting their authority, one that they probably felt was especially necessary in a frontier zone like Popayán, where Spanish control was still weak and precarious.

When the *encomenderos* were compelled to justify their actions against indigenous communities and their *caciques*, they usually explained that the natives refused to serve them. Such was also Marcos Castuera's defense. He claimed that people had ridiculed?? him for treating his natives so well, and that this good treatment made them very idle and reluctant to work to pay the tribute they owed. Furthermore, he claimed that if any maltreatment had taken place, it had happened a long time ago before the New Laws were proclaimed in the province. Back then, the natives were reluctant to serve, and it was necessary to be strict with them as the indigenous peoples were many and the Spaniards few. In any case, according to Castuera, he had never done anything to the natives with malicious intent, only to make them obey and pay what was due. (AGN, Caciques e indios 37, doc. 13, hojas 648v., 699r.–700r.)

Similarly, when Miguel Muñoz and Alvaro Gudino, two *encomenderos* from Almaguer, were accused of atrocities against indigenous peoples, they denied the charges but admitted taking part in a punitive expedition against the villages of La Cruz. They claimed that the expedition was necessary because the natives of La Cruz had refused to serve their *encomenderos*. (AGN, Caciques e Indios 67, d. 4, hojas 211r.–212r.) Juan Gomez, a Spanish *vecino* (citizen) of Almaguer, who also took part in the expedition, testified that the people of La Cruz were not at war with the Spaniards, but that they were giving "poor service" (*mala servidumbre*), for which they were punished. (AGN, Caciques e Indios 67, d. 2, hojas 109v.–110r.)

According to Jorge Gamboa, the natives often acquiesced to a certain amount of violence from their *encomenderos*, as long as they considered the *encomendero's* demands legitimate, and as long as the *encomendero* fulfilled his obligation to protect his *encomendados*. Without pressure, the *caciques* would probably not have paid tribute

at all, nor sent their subjects to work for the Spaniards. However, if the violence reached a level they considered excessive or illegitimate, they reacted by refusing to work, fleeing their villages or taking up arms. (Gamboa 2010, 272–285.)

There are also many examples of the *encomenderos* crossing the line and provoking a violent response, making their violence counterproductive. When Francisco Briceño (1500–1575) was governor of Popayán in 1550–1553, he proceeded over several trials against natives who had rebelled against the Spaniards. One of these was *cacique* Norindamo of Pozo, which was near the Spanish town of Arma. Norindamo had been obedient to the Spaniards, but later rebelled against them. He was condemned to be hanged as a punishment for himself and an example to others. The reason for the rebellion, according to Norindamo himself, was that they did not want to serve their *encomendero* or farm his land. (AGI, Justicia 575, n. 1, ff. 746r.–756r.) This is definitely not an isolated incident, but a common occurrence in (early) colonial society. The most famous examples are the rebellions of the Quimbayas, who lived around the Spanish town of Cartago, a mining region in the northern part of the *gobernación*. They had received the Spanish intruders peacefully and at least seemingly accepted their rule, but later revolted twice, first in 1542 and then in 1557. (Friede 1963, 47–87; Uusitalo 2021, 95–100.) The indigenous communities did not always acquiesce to Spanish rule and their demands, but occasionally resisted. The rebellions were usually suppressed and the leaders were severely punished, but constant fear of insurrection kept the Spanish constantly on their toes.

In 1557, the natives of Anserma apparently plotted to join a rebellion against the Spaniards started by the Quimbayas. When a *yanacona* (indigenous servant) and a *ladino* (indigenous person who spoke Spanish) called Antonio from the *pueblo* of Yria was asked why the natives wanted to rise against the Spaniards, he responded that they felt it was better to die than to carry cargo, hand over young men for religious teaching, work in the Spanish mines, or give women to serve the Spaniards’ needs. The communities had complained that the clerics had taken so many young men to be taught religion that there was no one left. The natives therefore wanted to fight and kill Christians or to perish in the attempt (AGI, Patronato 117, ramo 4, pieza 3, f. 3v.).

The indigenous peoples entrusted to Marcos Castuera also reacted strongly against their master’s cruelties. They tried to kill him at least twice by attacking him with sticks. The first time they had hit him once or twice on the head, but he had managed to escape on his horse. The second time his dogs saved him. In addition, the natives had refused to serve him or pay him tribute, and escaped from their village. (AGN, Caciques e indios 37, doc. 13, hoja 576v.) Both Castuera and his *encomendados* confirmed that these events had taken place. Despite Castuera’s claims to the contrary, relations with the *encomendero* were obviously extremely tense.

Comparisons with Peruvian regions show the specific nature of Popayán as a periphery. For example, in the Colca valley in Southern Peru, studied by Noble David Cook, Spanish rule was consolidated and a full *encomienda* system in place by 1540s. That is not to say that the Spanish control was complete, but it meant that domination by the Inca was replaced by domination by the Spanish, and the indigenous communities of the valley were integrated into the *encomienda* economy. (Cook 2007, 39.) By contrast,

the Spanish rule in Popayán was evidently much more fragile. The *encomenderos* attempted to assert their authority by all means necessary, but many of the indigenous communities refused to accept them as their overlords. There were certainly also conflicts between the *encomenderos* and the *encomendados* in Peru, but in Popayán the whole system was still in dispute. Therefore, the *encomenderos* felt more compelled to use violence to achieve their ends.

Violence, coercion, and conflict were not the only forms of inter-ethnic interaction in the colonial contact zone of the *gobernación* of Popayán, but during this period they were the most prominent forms. The early colonial period was a time of adaptation and learning, and involved testing the limits of acceptable behavior. The Spanish invaders were after a quick profit and determined to exploit the indigenous population to the maximum. The indigenous communities, on the other hand, were not ready to submit to all the demands of the conquerors without resistance. Colonial society was just emerging, and violence was an integral part of the negotiation between the different groups in it, especially in the peripheral regions, where the imperial institutions were still very weak.

## The Slow Institutionalization of Relations

Many scholars argue that Peruvian colonial society reached crisis point in the 1560s. (See Cook 2007; Mumford 2012; Stern 1982.) During the crisis, the post-Inca alliances between indigenous communities and Spanish conquerors formed during and after the conquest, disintegrated. The crisis strengthened the reformist ideas among the Spanish elite, and finally, in the 1570s, colonial society in Peru was thoroughly reorganized under Viceroy Francisco de Toledo (1515–1582). (Stern 1982, 49–50, 71–79.) During this period, the Spanish officials also started to pay more attention to the frontier of the viceroyalty. The royal *audiencia* of Quito was founded in 1563 and inaugurated in 1564, and the southern part of the *gobernación* of Popayán was incorporated into it, but *audiencia* control in the area remained relatively weak.

In this situation, the crown wanted to enhance its power over the *gobernación* and bring it under closer scrutiny. The most important institution that worked toward this end was the *visita*. There were four major *visitas* in the *gobernación* of Popayán during the second half of the sixteenth century. The first was before the crisis and reforms in the viceroyalty, but it was also part of the attempted bureaucratization of the area. Tomás López visited most of the towns of the *gobernación* and their jurisdictions in 1558–1559. The other three *visitas* were more limited in their geographical scope. Pedro de Hinojosa (d. 1579) visited the towns of Popayán, Cali, and Buga in 1569–1570, and García de Valverde the towns of Almaguer and Pasto in 1570–1571. (See Padilla 1977, 21–36.) In the northern part of the *gobernación*, which remained under the jurisdiction of the *audiencia* of Santafé, Diego Angulo de Castejón carried out a *visita* in 1567–1568. (Friede 1963, 115–135.)

The *visita*s of Hinojosa and Valverde occurred within the larger context of, and probably as a result of, the centralization of the viceroyalty of Peru, which started with the appointment of Francisco de Toledo as viceroy in 1569. It was customary for a viceroy to order a *visita* general after his arrival, and indeed Toledo was under

instructions from Philip II to do so. However, Toledo was not satisfied with simple tribute assessments, but felt that a full-scale inspection was needed. The ultimate aim was a complete restructuration of Andean society. Toledo appointed more than 63 experienced secular and religious officials to conduct the *visita*s, and he himself spent five years away from Lima supervising his projects throughout the viceroyalty. (Mumford 2012, 95–94; Cook 2007, 100–103.) Popayán was supposedly part of Toledo's viceroyalty, but his control in the *gobernación* was weak or nonexistent. Whether the *visita*s in Popayán were supervised in any way by viceroy Toledo is unknown, but at the very least they were probably inspired by his general inspection.

The royal orders for Hinojosa's *visita* clarify their function. Hinojosa was under orders to perform a census among the indigenous communities and find out about their livelihoods. He was to ascertain the various payments and services the natives made to their *caciques* and *encomenderos*, and to determine the tributes they could pay so that the payments would cause no harm and they would have enough left to provide for themselves and their families. The tributes were to be written down, with copies provided to the royal *audiencia*, the *encomendero* and the *cacique*. (AGI, Justicia 639, n. 2, pieza 1, ff. 125r.–127v.)

In addition, Hinojosa's task was to find out how the indigenous peoples were treated and to listen to all their grievances. He was to resolve all the cases presented to him concerning the natives, be they civil or criminal cases, and punish those guilty of maltreatment or other crimes. He also had orders to look into the conversion of the natives and find out if they were still practicing idolatry and sacrifices. Furthermore, Hinojosa was to relocate the natives as necessary, so that they would live together in villages in good order and in a civilized manner. He was also to ensure that the roads were kept open and in good condition to facilitate travel in the country. (AGI, Justicia 639, n. 2, pieza 1, ff. 125r.–127v.)

In short, the *visitadores*' task was to bring law and order to Popayán. From the point of view of the officials, the problem was that there were no rules on how much tribute a certain community should pay to their *encomenderos* or on what kind of service they were obliged to render. By the 1650s the system of rendering personal service was abandoned in most of the viceroyalty, but in Popayán it was still commonly used decades later, and the abuses against the indigenous population were correspondingly flagrant. The lack of control by the colonial centers left the local magnates feeling that they were free to do as they wished. (Powers 1995, 35.) As in the rest of the Spanish Empire, the local powerholders did not question royal authority as such, but the king was far away and his orders could simply be ignored if they seemed unrealistic in the local circumstances. This behavior was legitimized in the formula *obedezco pero no cumplo* (I obey but I do not fulfill).

Pedro de Hinojosa was particularly assiduous in investigating the *encomenderos'* crimes against the indigenous peoples and severely punished all Spaniards found guilty of their maltreatment. Three of these, the settler Hernando de Tovar, the missionary Alonso Camacho y Cordero, and Andres de Betanar, were sentenced to death and confiscation of half their properties for killings, robberies, and general maltreatment of the natives. All three were absent from the trial, and the two first mentioned had

managed to hide their assets, so the sentences could not be carried out. Overall, 34 Spaniards were sentenced, some of them among the most powerful men of Popayán. For example, Francisco de Belalcázar, the son and heir of Sebastián de Belalcázar, the conqueror of Popayán, was fined 600 pesos in gold (AGI, Justicia 639, n. 2, pieza 2, ff. 10r.–13r.), which was roughly the equivalent to the yearly tribute of two average sized indigenous communities at the time of the *visita* in the region that fell under the jurisdiction of the city of Popayán.

When Francisco de Belalcázar complained that the punishments of the *encomenderos* were too severe, Hinojosa rejoined that he was actually being lenient. If he had condemned the *encomenderos* in accordance with the severity of their crimes, all of them would have lost their *encomiendas*, but he had been reluctant to do so for fear of a rebellion. (AGI, Justicia 639, n. 2, pieza 2, ff. 5v., 7v.) Getting rid of the *encomenderos* was probably not in the crown's interests either. In the unruly borderlands, the crown needed men capable of asserting their authority over the indigenous peoples and familiar with local conditions. At the same time, the crown needed to be able to show that it could protect its more vulnerable subjects and dispense justice for them. Therefore, the royal officials needed to intervene in cases of severe excesses by *encomenderos* while continuing to benefit from their aggressiveness. This coincides well with the argument made by Mats Hallenberg regarding the early modern Swedish empire, where the process of controlling aggressive aristocrats and bailiffs was quicker at the center than on the periphery of the expanding empire. (Hallenberg 2013, 142–144.)

On the other hand, the indigenous peoples of the *gobernación* were, from the Spanish viewpoint, insubordinate. For example, the villages in the provinces of Banba and Ceyna were divided into *encomiendas*, but López could not visit them as they were at war with the Spaniards. He urged the *encomenderos* to do everything they could to pacify the natives "with saintly and good methods" (*por medios santos y buenos*), which included persuading them with gifts. The Spaniards were moreover required to show a good example to them to promote their conversion to Christianity. (AGI, Quito 60a, f. 68v.)

López also had similar problems elsewhere. The indigenous communities living in the jurisdiction of the towns of San Sebastian de la Plata and Timana were dispersed in the mountains and unwilling to submit to Spanish rule. The *visitador* wanted to gather these people into Spanish-style towns to pacify and civilize them, but the Spaniards simply lacked the means. (AGI, Quito 60a, ff. 73v.–74r.) These same reasons also prevented Hinojosa from accessing some of his designated destinations He could not travel to the villages surrounding the city of Buga, north of Cali, as the region was still very unstable and some of the indigenous peoples were still hostile or in *mala paz* (poor peace), and reluctant to serve the Spaniards. As a result, Hinojosa never carried out the *visita* in Buga, but left only general instructions on good governance of the natives. (AGI, Justicia 639, n. 2, pieza 2, ff. 15r.–17v.)

Although they achieved no instant transformation, the importance of the *visitas* is that for the first time relations between the Spanish *encomenderos* and the indigenous communities entrusted to them were regulated in detail. The *visitas* created an arena

where the conflicting interests of crown, church, *encomenderos*, local officials, and indigenous peoples intersected. They challenged the *encomendero* hegemony characterized by a disregard for the colonial legislation, and brought the area under the scrutiny of the central authorities, at least while they were in progress. The immediate effects of the *visitas* were limited. After the *visitadores* left the region, many of their orders and regulations were disregarded. That certain orders had to be reissued every time a *visita* was made in the seventeenth century indicates that they were not enforced between the *visitas*. (Calero 1997, 60–62.) However, the *visitas* were important steps in the protracted bureaucratization of colonial Popayán, as they laid the foundations for the penetration of the area by the colonial structure by bringing its central administration to the local level, albeit temporarily.

All the *visitadores* personally visited at least some of the indigenous villages, or ordered the communities to gather in the nearest Spanish town, and interviewed their people, or at least their leaders. The *visitas* were places of negotiation, mediation, struggle, and coercion. They created institutional contact zones, if only for the duration of the *visita*, where all sectors of the local society were involved and interethnic relations could be negotiated under the guidance of the representatives of the crown. The groups did not meet on an equal footing, as v*isitadores* and other Spaniards had a condescending attitude toward the indigenous peoples, but they afforded them an opportunity to challenge the authority of the *encomenderos*.

The *visitador* García de Valverde stated in the ordinances that the natives of Pasto were showing incipient signs of civilization, which had enabled them to bring more and more complaints before the colonial courts. This was beginning to be a problem, as is necessitated the natives traveling to Spanish towns, to the detriment of their designated tasks. To solve this problem, Valverde ordered that each indigenous village should elect officials from among their leaders, so that they could process the less serious cases among themselves. The more serious cases should still be brought before a Spanish judge, but as the natives were beginning to be capable of handling them, the powers of their own officials could be increased. (AGI, Quito 60b, ff. 717v.–718r.)

These orders are an example of how the institutionalization of interethnic relations took effect. The colonial courts were gaining a stronger position as an arena for negotiation between the indigenous communities and their Spanish *encomenderos* on the frontiers, a position they had already established in the more central parts of the empire. The indigenous peoples of Peru soon gained a reputation as a litigious people, and by the 1550s, they were already flooding the *audiencia* of Lima with their petitions and suits. (Stern 1982, 115) In Popayán, the natives used the colonial courts less frequently, but Garcia de Valverde's orders imply that by 1570 they were actively using the legal system.

The judicial system slowly extended to even the most remote areas of the *gobernación*, albeit perhaps piecemeal. For example, in 1592 don Felipe Soma, *cacique* of Tatudaca near the town of Toro, brought an action an *encomendero* called García Suero de Cangas for removing one of his *principales* (lower ranking chiefs) called Bocorri from his community. According to don Felipe, Suero de Cangas had illegally incorporated Bocorri and his subjects into his own *encomienda*, although the *principal* had always

served don Felipe. Don Felipe was backed by his *encomendero* Benito Suárez, but he acted on his own account. (AGN, Encomiendas 16, d. 20, hojas 672r.–674v.) In their verdict, the *audiencia* of Santafé de Bogotá ordered that Bocorri and his subjects be returned to don Felipe. García Suero de Cangas tried to get the sentence revoked, but the *audiencia* maintained that their original decision was correct and just. (AGN, Encomiendas 16, d. 20, hojas 810r., 821r.)

Toro was one of the more remote Spanish towns in the *gobernación*, founded only in 1573. The attacks of the indigenous peoples of Choco made the Spanish presence precarious, but still the *cacique* decided to take his case to the Spanish court. This example illustrates that the colonial bureaucracy was developing even on the peripheries. Typically, the court cases form part of a long and complicated conflict where the parties also resorted to other methods,, such as violence, coercion or flight. Violence and litigation were not mutually exclusive; different strategies of interethnic negotiation intertwined and blended into each other.

Indigenous involvement in the Spanish legal system has been a very popular topic in the recent historiography of Spanish America. Much has been written on native litigation in recent historical research as a part of a more comprehensive reassessment of colonial history and the role of the indigenous peoples therein. (See Yannakakis 2013, 931–947.) For the colonial administration, indigenous litigation was a way of channeling their discontent into the judicial system as an alternative to fomenting rebellion, while for the natives, it afforded a means of advancing their own interests within the colonial context. (Mumford 2008, 5.) María de los Ángeles Romero Frizzi has suggested that Spain's success in building an empire was based largely on its ability to impose a set of laws and juridical norms on people of different cultural traditions. The new vassals of the king, the indigenous peoples, used the colonial courts to settle their internal disputes and gain more prestige, while paradoxically helping to bolster the Spanish judicial system. (Romero Frizzi 2010, 107, 127).

Romero Frizzi's model applies in part to the situation in Popayán. Compared to Peru and Mexico, there are relatively few court cases from Popayán in the archives, either because the records have not survived or because the cases were processed orally and litigation was not as common as it was in the central areas. Local courts were probably unreliable from the point of view of the indigenous peoples, the royal *audiencias* were far away, and the legal system was much less developed on the peripheries. This emphasizes the importance of the *visitas* in bringing the central administration to the local level.

The emerging colonial society was becoming more stable towards the end of the sixteenth century. In Peru, the crisis of the 1560s was followed by a thorough reorganization of Andean society, with profound effects on the lives of the indigenous people, although viceroy Toledo and his followers never completely succeeded in their attempt to create their utopia of docile communities dedicated to serving the Spaniards. (Cook 2007, 82–104.) In Popayán, the effects of the central authorities' attempts at reform remained much more limited.

The Augustinian friar Jerónimo de Escobar wrote a report on the situation of the natives of the *gobernación* of Popayán in 1582, suggesting that nothing had changed from the times of Juan del Valle. According to Escobar, the natives throughout the *gobernación* lived in poor conditions enduring hard labor and maltreatment, and without sufficient Christianization. (AGI, Patronato 27, ramo 13.) Jerónimo de Escobar was a companion of the Bishop of Popayán Agustín de la Coruña, a champion of the rights of the indigenous peoples as was his predecessor, Juan del Valle. At the same time, like all clerics, he was an agent of the colonial empire. Escobar wanted to draw attention to the wretched conditions of the indigenous peoples and the need to increase efforts for their conversion, and his report was directed against the *encomenderos*. It was written by a person familiar with the situation at first-hand, but he probably exaggerated the misery of the natives. However, such reports are very common. They indicate that interethnic relationships were far from stable or regulated (at the time).

Despite the instability of the frontier, a development toward the institutionalization of interethnic relations during the second half of the sixteenth century is discernible. Although the preservation of documents in the archive is often a matter of chance, the small number of cases compared to the central areas of the Peruvian viceroyalty indicate that in Popayán the judicial system was not quite as developed. However, it was indeed established and to an extent even permeated the most remote areas of the *gobernación*, which in itself is important. The institutions of the colonial empire were still fragile, and most of the conflicts were most likely settled by other means, but litigation was a worthwhile option for the colonial subjects of the frontier zones, indigenous and Spaniards alike.

## Unfinished Conquest and the Continuing Wars on the Frontiers

Despite the increasing encroachment of the institutions of the colonial empire, Spanish control in the *gobernación* of Popayán remained weak throughout the sixteenth century and beyond. The Spaniards effectively controlled a narrow strip reaching from south to north along the valley of the River Cauca extending from Popayán to Santa Fe de Antioquía, and the valley of Atris south of that strip. The main Spanish cities and towns were located within that strip, where the Spanish control was precarious but still reasonably consolidated. To the east of the strip lay the central cordilleras of the Andean mountains, and to the west the western cordilleras and the Pacific lowlands. These regions were hard to reach, as many of them still are, and some of them remained beyond Spanish and later Colombian control well into the nineteenth century. They were dangerous lands for the Spaniards.

On the frontiers of the *gobernación* the conquest continued for a long time. The *gobernación* of Popayán became a base for repeated Spanish *entradas* (invasions) and *castigos* (punitive expeditions) to the rough mountains and almost impenetrable rainforests, which continued long into the seventeenth century and beyond. Popayán was a frontier area where violence and warfare were present in everyday life to a much greater extent than they were in most regions of Peru and Mexico. The lands of unconquered peoples were relatively close, and their presence was also a part of the local dynamic.

By the late sixteenth century, the central parts of the Spanish colonial empire already lived under the *Pax Colonial*, or *Pax Hispanica*. Throughout the colonial period, until the wars of independence, most inhabitants of the colonies never directly experienced war and its concomitant disasters such as sieges, plundering or armies devastating the land. In fact, Spain never had a standing army in her colonies. This experience represents a stark contrast to that of early modern Europe, which was continuously plagued by warfare. (Bakewell 1997, 113.)

However, many scholars have justifiably criticized the concept of colonial peace, because endemic violence continued throughout the colonial period. It is true that there were no major indigenous revolts between roughly 1550 and 1750, which, under the circumstances, is remarkable indeed. On the other hand, hostilities along the frontier continued throughout the colonial period. As the critics arguing against the *Pax Colonial* remind us, colonial empires do not reduce warfare but rather displace it to the more distant locations on the frontiers of empire. (MacLeod 1998, 130–132.) Even a full-scale indigenous rebellion that would succeed in expelling the Spaniards from the locality was still a possibility in Popayán, although the high mortality made it unlikely. In Lima or Mexico City such an event was far less likely, if not inconceivable. (Lane 2002, 233.) The frontiers certainly experienced no *Pax Colonial*. Popayán was a periphery where violence and warfare were omnipresent as many documents show.

In 1579, Francisco Redondo asked the king for help against the Pijaos in the name of the towns of Popayan, Cali, Almaguer, Buga, Cartago, and Anserma. The Pijaos were causing extensive damage to the Spaniards throughout the *gobernación* of Popayán and in the New Kingdom of Granada by attacking the towns and the roads and killing both Spaniards and natives. The town of Neiva had been completely depopulated, and, according to Robledo, the Pijaos had eaten all the natives of the town. The village of San Vicente de Paez was also depopulated, and the village of San Sebastián de la Plata had been burned to the ground twice. (AGI, Quito 18, n. 51.) [8] In December 1585, Governor Juan de Tuesta Salazar told the *cabildo* (town council) of Popayán that one of the most pressing issues for the *gobernación* would be to end the depredations of the Nasas (Paeces) and the Pijaos, which had continued for forty years and more and cost the lives of both Spaniards and peaceful natives. (ACC, Cabildo, Libros de Belalcázar, 1585–15, 17 Dec. 1585, f. 89r.)

Indigenous attacks on Spaniards and their subjects were not the only reason for the continuing violence. Many Spaniards had incentives to perpetuate the hostilities Looting and pillaging were potentially profitable, and taking part in *entradas* and *castigos* was a way to ingratiate oneself and subsequently gain favors from the king, for example an *encomienda*. There were enough “conquistador wanna-bes”, as Kris Lane calls them, who had missed out on the grand prize, and wanted to have their share. Many less fortunate veterans of earlier conquests and civil wars among the conquerors came to Popayán in search of new opportunities on the restless frontier. A large contingent of disbanded and malcontent soldiers caused anxiety and unrest in the *gobernación*. It was in their interests to perpetuate the conquistador economy, and participation in entradas also became a necessary rite of passage for young colonial men eager to prove themselves. Their campaigns were often unsuccessful in subjecting the natives, but they managed to kill and displace many thousands of them. (Lane 2002,

208–215; Montoya Guzmán 2004, 25.) Violence thus continued to be endemic along the frontier and on the roads connecting the towns.

Although most of this violence took place on the frontiers, even the capital city of the *gobernación* was not safe. On Christmas Eve 1585, the *cabildo* of Popayán ordered that all the horses of the city should remain saddled overnight as there were fears that the Nasas (Paeces) and the Toribíos might attempt to attack during the night while the people were celebrating. (ACC, Cabildo, Libros de Belalcázar, 1585-18, 24 Dec. 1585, f. 95v.) If violence was pushed to the imperial frontiers during the *Pax Hispanica*, the city of Popayán was clearly in the frontier zone, despite being a regional center within the larger colonial structure. The local experience differed from that of the major cities and towns of Peru, where colonial wars were but a distant phenomenon.

In February 1586, the *cabildo* of Popayán ordered all the inhabitants of the city to appear on parade in full arms so that the Nasas (Paeces) and the Pijaos living there would see their power and pass the news to their people, who would (hopefully) realize that it would be better to submit. (ACC, Cabildo, Libros de Belalcázar, 1586-5, 15 Feb. 1586, ff. 122r.–123r.) It is not clear whether these natives were slaves captured in the wars or people who had moved to Popayán of their own free will. Probably there were people from both groups, but they clearly had connections to their kin in the zone that was out of Spanish reach. This adds another element to the inter-ethnic relations. The distinction between peaceful communities which had submitted to Spanish rule and the peoples who were fighting them was never clear-cut.

These frontier areas were like the better-known North American indigenous-white frontiers, although there is one major and important difference between the contact zones of North and Spanish America. In colonial Spanish America, the indigenous communities always outnumbered people of European origin, but such was not necessarily the case in North America. [9] However, in both cases the frontiers were messy, eclectic contact zones where the two ethnic groups competed for resources but also shared skills, foods, and customs. (Hämäläinen 2008, 7–8.) Richard White calls them the middle ground, the place between empires and the indigenous communities where the European colonists were unable to subject the indigenous peoples but could not ignore them. In the middle ground, both sides were unable to gain their ends through force and therefore had to find ways to coexist. (White 1991, x, 52.) The encounters were not necessarily peaceful nor necessarily equal, but both sides had to adapt to new circumstances.

Popayán is one of many examples on the Spanish colonial frontiers where the conquest did not parallel the conquests of the central areas. Oversimplification must be avoided here. The conquests of Mexico and Peru are often portrayed as unmitigated success stories, which they were not. The conquest of what would later be called Latin America remained incomplete for centuries after these events. The conquistadors claimed dominion over lands as soon as they discovered them and proclaimed their inhabitants subjects of the king, but it is important to remember that for decades, even centuries, the majority of the indigenous peoples of the colonies lived in their own communities under their own chiefs, speaking their own languages and working their own fields. (Restall 2012, 65–73.) However, Spaniards did enjoy relative success in the central

area, where they were able to use the existing institutions of the indigenous societies to impose at least indirect control over them. The Spanish conquests of areas such as Yucatan, Northern and Central Mexico, Chile, and the Northern Andes, are often thought to mirror those of Peru and Mexico, but a closer look at these peripheral areas shows that the Spaniards found it much more difficult to assert their control there. The decentralized societies of these areas proved much more effective than the centralized empires in contesting the conquerors attempts to rule them, or perhaps simply more difficult to control because of the number of chiefdoms that had to be dealt with through either negotiation or force. (Altman 2010, 3–5; Calero 1997, 53–54.)

Throughout the *gobernación*, colonial society settled toward the end of the sixteenth century, but it remained a frontier zone within the larger imperial context. Peace was at best precarious and social dynamics continued fluid. The colonial contact zone was conflictual as many of the indigenous communities refused to accept Spanish domination without a fight. The instability affected the whole *gobernación*, including the main Spanish cities. Frontier wars were never far from the major Spanish towns. Although even the periphery became integrated into the empire to an extent, as a frontier region Popayán was different from the center. It was more ambiguous, unpredictable, and full of contradictions.

## Conclusions

In this article, I have shown that Spanish colonial society was inherently conflictual, and that relations between indigenous peoples and Spaniards in early colonial Popayán were always uneasy, characterized by improvisation, instability, and distrust. Relations were not fixed as the inter-ethnic dynamics changed constantly. Violence was not separate from other forms of inter-ethnic relations, but part of the everyday interaction. Understanding the complexity of these relations is essential to understand early colonial society. Especially in the early colonial period, personal relationships were more important than the colonial institutions. Little by little, the colonial bureaucracy took steps to increase its control, but the development was very slow and faltering. At the same time, the indigenous peoples started to make increasing use of the legal channels at their disposal instead of or in addition to more direct forms of resistance.

On the periphery, overt violence and the threat of it were probably more present than they were in the central areas, because there were fewer structures to contain it. The sheer distance from the *audiencias* and the viceregal court as well as the culture of unruliness made it easy to simply ignore the law. The fear of indigenous rebellion may have kept the *encomenderos* in check to an extent, but it also gave them an excuse to use harsh methods against the natives and punish them excessively for any sign of non-compliance.

The aim of this article is not to emphasize the conflicts and violence or to dispute that there were also peaceful forms of interaction. Rather, the focus has been on conflicts because they show that colonial society building was neither a straightforward nor an undisputed process. The colonial contact zone was a place of negotiation, but also a place of struggle, where the indigenous subjects constantly challenged the conquerors' aspirations. Struggle and negotiation were not mutually exclusive as forms of

interaction. Violence and threat of it were part of the negotiation process. The inter-ethnic conflicts were a dynamic force through which the colonial society took shape.

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[1] The Spanish monarchy was formed through the marriage of Queen Isabella I of Castile (reigned 1474–1504) and King Ferdinand II of Aragon (reigned 1479–1516), but the two kingdoms remained *de jure* separate until the early eighteenth century. The American colonies were possessions of the Castilian crown.

[2] According to Daniel E. Shea, an idealized stable population should have a total population equal to four times the adult male population, but no real population has ever had that exact ratio. See Shea 1992, 172–173. The multipliers used by demographers vary depending on place and time, but I assume the ratio to be somewhere between 3:1 and 5:1.

[3] Paez (pl. Paeces) is the name given to this group by the Spaniards during the conquest. It is a Hispanicization of the name of a certain *cacique* in Tierradentro during the Spanish invasion. Later, in the 1990s, the group chose to call itself Nasa, which in their language means living being, Nasa Yuwe. See Rappaport *Intercultural Utopias*, 64, 286. I have chosen to refer to the group by the name they have given themselves, but for the sake of clarity, I added the name used in the sources in parentheses.

[4] Belalcázar's name also occurs as Benalcázar.

[5] The Spaniards loaned the word *cacique* from the Taínos, who inhabited the Caribbean islands at the time of the Spanish arrival and used it to refer to all the indigenous chiefs throughout the continent. The role of the *cacique* varied significantly according to the pre-colonial traditions, but colonialism reduced the divergence.

[6] In a census carried out by Tomás López seven years later, Sebastian Quintero menor, apparently the minor son of the by then deceased Sebastian Quintero, had in his possession the third largest *encomienda* in the city with 775 tribute paying (adult male) natives. (AGI, Quito 60a, ff. 63v., 67r.)

[7] It is not known exactly when the events took place, but it is mentioned that they happened before the New Laws were proclaimed in the province, meaning before August 1544. The reason for taking the matters to court after so many years is also unknown. The so-called New Laws (*Leyes Nuevas*) were issued in 1542 to restrict the power of the *encomenderos* and the abuses against the indigenous peoples.

[8] At least some of the indigenous groups in Popayán practiced cannibalism, but the Spanish descriptions of it are exaggerated. Eating a piece of flesh of a slain enemy was a symbolic rite believed to give the eater the strength of the deceased. See Llanos Vargas 1981, 75–76.

[9] In the early colonial period, Europeans were greatly outnumbered in the Spanish colonies, and as late as 1789, indigenous peoples still constituted 56% of the Spanish American population. In contrast, Europeans outnumbered natives in certain areas of British colonial North America almost from the beginning. See Elliot 2009, 150–162.

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