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The longue durée of Colonial Violence in Latin America

Wolfgang Gabbert *

Abstract: *»Die longue durée kolonialer Gewalt in Lateinamerika«*. There can be no doubt that physical violence was a constant feature of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism in Latin America. Far from being uniform, however, the form and extent of colonial violence varied considerably between different regions and time periods. The paper discusses these differences and relates them, among other things, to the character of the native societies as well as to the different systems of economic exploitation the colonizers used. In another section, the patterns of violent protest against colonial rule will be discussed where periods of relative "peacefulness" alternated with times of massive violence. Beyond this, it is argued that alliances between Europeans and indigenous groups played an important role in the establishment and preservation of colonial rule. Emphasizing native complicity in the colonial system by no means absolves Europeans from their responsibility for colonialism in Latin America as such or, more specifically, for the bulk of colonial violence. However, in view of the fact that the Spanish and Portuguese remained a small minority throughout most of Latin America up to the end of the colonial period, this aspect seems crucial to the understanding of how colonialism was possible at all. In a concluding section the long term consequences of the colonial violence and its legitimizing ideas after independence will be discussed.

Keywords: violence, colonialism, resistance, Latin America, Indians.

Introduction

> After having killed not only all people of rank but almost all males capable of bearing arms, the Spaniards subjected the rest [of the natives] to devilish serfdom and exacted slaves as a tribute. Since the natives did not own other slaves they had to hand over their own sons and daughters. Shiploads of which were sent to Peru to be sold. Beyond this [the Spaniards] committed so many murderous deeds and atrocities that an entire kingdom ... which had been one of the most populous and fertile on earth was utterly destroyed.[1]

This quote comes from a small pamphlet that has influenced the notions about the Spanish conquest and colonization of Latin America probably more than

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[1] Las Casas 1981: 55, transl. W. G.

most.[2] In his *Brief Account of the Devastation of the West Indies* written in 1542, the Dominican Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas described the establishment of colonial rule as an uninterrupted chain of massacres, torture and atrocities of all kinds leading to depopulation and the annihilation of indigenous cultures.[3] His writings became a corner-stone of the so-called "Black Legend". This tradition of anti-Hispanic criticism developed in the sixteenth century, flourished from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries – not least as an ideological weapon in the struggle among European powers for colonial possessions – and has continued to influence interpretations of Spanish colonialism to the present day.[4]

Apologists of Spanish colonialism, however, created a "White Legend". They simply down-played colonial violence or suggested that the Spaniards had put an end to cannibalism, human sacrifice and other barbarities allegedly practiced in native societies and had introduced Christianity, civilization, and the *pax hispanica* that ended the endemic warfare between neighbouring indigenous groups.[5]

Curiously enough, the otherwise antagonistic versions coincide in depicting America's indigenous population as mere victims of Spanish or Portuguese activity. However, a more nuanced attitude towards Latin American colonialism has begun to develop of late, correcting the Spanish-centred view of Black and White Legends.

There can be no doubt that violence[6] was a constant feature of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism in Latin America. The most impressive evidence in support of this statement are the tremendous population losses experienced by native societies. Estimates of the pre-conquest population are difficult and figures cannot be more than "informed guesses".[7] Nevertheless, it seems safe to say that a veritable demographic catastrophe occurred, leading to a reduction of the native population by up to 90 per cent in many regions and complete depopulation in others. Thus, the indigenous inhabitants on Hispaniola were exterminated already in the middle of the sixteenth century. In Mexico and Central America, for example, the native population declined from 11-25 million on the eve of the conquest to around 1.25 million in 1625. Apparently

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[2] For reasons of space, I will focus on the Spanish role in Latin America in what follows.
[3] Cf. Las Casas 1981: *passim*.
[4] For the "black legend" see, for example, Konetzke 1963: 8-10.
[5] See, for example, Sepúlveda 1951 and for more recent examples, Konetzke 1963: 7f, 10f, 182f; Arranz Márquez 1986: 10. Cf. also Konetzke 1965: 36-8; Coe 1986: 20; Becker 1986: 36; MacLeod 2000: 11f.
[6] For reasons of space I will limit myself here on instances of collective physical violence.
[7] Farriss 1984: 57.

population losses were a little less severe in Peru.[8] Although most deaths were due to epidemics such as influenza or small pox, the warfare, forced labour, and famines that resulted from the break-down of pre-colonial systems of production and distribution also played their part.[9]

Far from being uniform, however, the form and extent of colonial violence varied considerably between different regions and time periods. This is hardly surprising, since the colonial period in Latin America covers three full centuries.

Regional and Temporal Diversity

The overall structure and dynamics of colonialism in Latin America were the result of a complex interplay between the interests, capacities, and ideology of the Iberians on the one hand, and, the diversity of indigenous societies on the other. By misnaming the indigenous population "Indian" (*indio*), the Spanish created the fiction of a homogeneous colonial "other". In fact, however, the possibly 40-50 million inhabitants who peopled the Americas on the eve of the conquest in the late fifteenth century differed widely in language, culture, economy, and social organization. Linguists guess that they spoke languages belonging to more than 100 language families.[10]

Mesoamerica in the north and the Andean highlands in the south were the most densely settled parts of Latin America. Based on the intensive cultivation of corn, potatoes and other crops, complex societies such as the Inca and Aztec empires, each with several million subjects, evolved. They were characterized, among other things, by urbanism, class stratification, and state religions.

The intermediate area comprising the West Indian Islands, Central America and the northern parts of South America was also densely inhabited by people mostly organized in chiefdoms. In these mainly agricultural societies centralized leadership and inequality in the form of ranking prevailed. Political and social organization, however, was less complex than in core areas. Similar structures existed in the south and southeast of the Andes and on the fertile alluvial plains (*varzeas*) along the major streams of the Latin American lowlands, such as the Amazon and Orinoco. Most of the Latin American lowlands (with the exception of the Yucatan peninsula) were populated by often highly

[8] See Livi-Bacci 2003 for Hispaniola, Coe 1986: 20f on Mexico and Central America and Edelmayer 1996: 54; Spalding 1999: 932 for Peru. For other regions cf. also Gibson 1964: 136-144; Hemming 1978: 444f, 487-501; Wolf 1982: 133-5; Bethell 1984b.

[9] See, for example, Hill 1999: 470; Garavaglia 1999: 24-6; Livi-Bacci 2003.

[10] More than 200 languages are known for Mesoamerica alone. See Coe 1986: 42-5, 86, 156f.

mobile people, who combined hunting and fishing with gathering and gardening.[11]

The differences between the native societies sketched above had significant consequences for the patterns of conquest and colonization in each region. Indigenous state societies were conquered in relatively short periods. The Aztec empire of central Mexico, for example, fell after little more than two years (1519-21).[12] The Spaniards ousted only the top imperial leaders from offices, installing themselves at the apex of an already existent highly centralized political hierarchy. The common population, mostly composed of peasants and their families, was accustomed to relinquishing parts of their surplus product and labour to the aristocracy and the state. Thus, the Spaniards were able to refer to well-established institutions of government and exploitation. Although the enslavement of Indians played a major role during the conquest and the initial years thereafter, it was soon replaced by different forms of tribute (e.g., *encomienda*) and forced labour (*repartimiento*, *cuatequil*, *mita*).[13]

The most vital sector of the colonial economy in Mexico and the Andes was the exploitation of the silver deposits discovered in the mid-sixteenth century. Mostly Spanish-owned large estates (*estancias*, *haciendas*) for breeding cattle, sheep, and goats or growing European crops such as wheat for the colony's domestic market began to develop from the seventeenth century onwards. However, the indigenous population was not completely deprived of their lands, and native peasant communities remained an important sector of colonial society. Although they were obliged to provide labour and pay tribute to the Crown, they were granted rights to village lands and resources as well as to a limited form of self-administration by native officials. The Indian communities thus functioned as producers of surplus that could be appropriated by the Crown and the *encomenderos*, as a reservoir of labour for the mines, haciendas, and other Spanish enterprises and, at the same time, as a source of cheap foodstuffs and craft products.[14] The Crown and the Catholic Church made efforts to control the excessive exploitation of Indians by the Spanish in order to main-

[11] For general overviews see the contributions of León-Portilla, Helms, Murra, Hidalgo, and Hemming in Bethell 1984a, I; see also Roosevelt 1987; Whitehead 1999a; Rostworowski 1999.

[12] A discussion of the reasons for the Spanish success can be found in Gabbert 1995 and 2010. In the Andes it took considerably longer (1532-1539) before Spanish control was established.

[13] In its "classic" form the *encomienda* meant the privilege of receiving the tribute of a group of Indians granted by the king. In *repartimiento*, Indian communities had to release a fraction of its able-bodied population at periodic intervals to work for Spanish employers. See, for example, Gibson 1984: 399-407; Garavaglia 1999: 9-15.

[14] See, for example, Zavala/Miranda 1954: 67-77, 80-98, 124-32; Taylor 1979: 160f, 166; Wolf 1982: 141-9; Gibson 1984: 388-95, 399-411; Spalding 1999: 934-42.

tain their capacity to provide tribute and labour, and to foster their willingness to convert to Christianity.[15]

Conquest and the subsequent establishment of colonial rule was more difficult in the case of less centralized native societies, where each chiefdom or village had to be conquered individually. The Spaniards were confronted with the difficult task of fundamentally changing existent patterns of authority, division of labour and distribution of surplus, etc. Among many of the lowland tribes, stable leadership institutions had to be newly invented. The natives were frequently unwilling to work for others or to hand over their products unless they were obliged by force to.[16] Since gold and silver deposits (exploitable at that time) were either limited or non-existent, native inhabitants constituted the sole "commodity" of interest to Europeans.[17] Slavery remained a key institution of colonial exploitation for a much longer period here than in the colonial core areas. This was especially true for the frontier regions and large areas that remained outside effective Spanish and Portuguese control, such as northern Mexico, parts of the Amazonian lowlands, the pampas of Argentina, and southern Chile. The native people here were subject to violent incursions of Spanish troops and slave raiders for the entire colonial period.[18]

Another form of slavery developed on the West Indian Islands and the Brazilian coast. The West Indies was the first region of Latin America to be conquered by Europeans. During the initial decades after the arrival of Columbus, it was to experience Spanish colonialism in its most anarchic and violent form, which led to the total disappearance of the Indian population on the larger islands within a few generations.[19] Tupi Guaraní-speaking groups scattered along the Brazilian coastline met a similar fate. They were rapidly decimated by incursions and slave raids once Portuguese colonization had begun in earnest in 1533. The lack in both regions of a local native labour force stimulated slave raids in the hitherto unconquered adjacent areas. As a result, the Spanish began hunting slaves on the Lesser Antilles and in mainland Central America during the first half of the sixteenth century.[20] In Nicaragua, for example, about 200,000 indigenous people were enslaved and sold to the Caribbean Islands, Panama or Peru in the first half of the sixteenth century alone.[21]

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[15] See, for example, Taylor 1979: 16-9; Wright and Carneiro da Cunha 1999: 307-12; Spalding 1999: 959; Stavig 2000: 88, 111.

[16] See, for example, Lockhart 1984: 281-83; Garavaglia 1999: 1f.

[17] See for Brazil Hemming 1984: 503.

[18] See Lockhart 1984: 283-5; Gibson 1984: 385; Hildago 1984: 91f; Hemming 1984: 536-45; Wright/Carneiro da Cunha 1999: 293, 295, 306, 318-21, 329f, 347-50; Hill 1999: 709; Garavaglia 1999: 6f; Langfur 2002.

[19] See, for example, Whitehead 1999a: 868, 871f, 889; Livi-Bacci 2003.

[20] See Gibson 1984: 401f; Coe 1986: 21; Whitehead 1999a: 873; Monteiro 1999.

[21] See MacLeod 1973: 52.

The enslavement of Indians was forbidden by the so-called New Laws (*Nuevas Leyes*) in the Spanish colonies in 1542 and in Brazil in 1570. However, this restriction did not apply to the indigenous inhabitants in the frontier areas if they denied to acknowledge the Spanish or Portuguese Crown's supremacy.[22] Continuing well into the eighteenth century, Portuguese slave raids proceeded along the Amazon and southwards into Paraguay.[23] Even drastic measures such as these were unable to satisfy the labour needs of the developing plantation economies, so that African slaves had to be imported on a massive scale especially to the Caribbean islands and Brazil.

Conquest, Consolidation, and Crisis

The conquest was certainly the most violent period in Latin America's colonial history. Indigenous groups were either directly subjected to massive military force or, through the selective employment of massacres and atrocities, convinced of the colonizer's might and the futility of resistance[24]. This phase lingered on in the frontier areas for quite some time, and military campaigns against unsubmissive Indians beyond the colonial frontier continued throughout the colonial period.

In the core areas of Mexico and Peru, however, colonial rule was consolidated by the middle of the sixteenth century. Here too, violence was at the bottom of colonialism. Leaders of crushed rebellions, for example, were often treated with extreme cruelty. One of them, Jacinto Canek, was tortured and executed in Merida, Yucatan (Mexico) on 14th December 1761. He was killed by a blow on his head, after his limbs had been broken and his flesh ripped apart with pincers while he was still alive. Tupac Amaru II was drawn and quartered by four horses in the city of Cuzco (Peru) in April 1781.[25]

However, the emergence of several institutions helped to limit the use of massive physical force – that is, force above the level of everyday forms of violence (to adapt a James Scott expression). With minor exceptions, what has become known as *pax hispanica* prevailed after the turmoil of the conquest and its aftermath:

> The Spanish conquest, it may be thought ironically, did in fact bring peace to the central Mexican communities for a period of some 300 years, and the pa-

[22] See Zavala/Miranda 1954: 83-7; Bakewell 1997: 305, 328; Monteiro 1999: 1005f.
[23] See Edmundson 1922; Hemming 1978: 38-44; Bakewell 1997: 321f, 328f; Hill 1999: 709, 737, 739, 742f.
[24] For examples of such 'terrorising techniques' see Restall (2003, 24f).
[25] See Bricker 1981: 75; Campbell 1979: 11.

cific situation of the colony contrasts strikingly with the many interurban wars of the era before 1519.[26]

Wars and rebellions were quite common in the pre-conquest indigenous empires of the Inca and Aztecs. Beyond this, the Aztec empire, for example, did not attempt to suppress warfare within its boundaries with the result that violent conflict was not infrequent among city-states subject to Aztec rulers.[27] The Spanish administration, in contrast, claimed a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Very early on, the Crown introduced an extended territorial administration that aimed not only at dominating the Indians but also at taming the conquerors and colonists and curbing any rival claims to power that might emerge from the latter. In the initial decades, the foundation was laid for a system of government that was codified and regularized to a hitherto unknown degree.[28]

One indication of the changes that occurred in the course of colonial rule are the patterns of rural rebellion in the core areas.[29] When anti-colonial rebellions ceased in the sixteenth century[30], the subsequent period of comparative stability persisted up to the late eighteenth century. This does not imply a total absence of violent protest. However, any uprisings that occurred were usually spontaneous small-scale affairs confined to a single community and can be seen as protests against abuse by local officials rather than a fundamental attack on colonial rule as such.[31] This is a striking contrast to the patterns of rebellion on the colonial periphery, where large-scale rebellions were launched throughout the entire colonial period.[32]

It would be tempting to recall Eric Wolf's insight into the origins of peasant rebellions, which suggests that the main actors in many of the rural rebellions were peasants located in peripheral areas outside the centre of landlord control, thus disposing of at least some "tactical power".[33] Although there is undeniably

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[26] Gibson 1955: 586. What Gibson suggests here for central Mexico seems to be valid for the colonial core areas in general.

[27] See Rowe 1946: 206-9; Hassig 1988: 257; Katz 1988b: 70f; Berdan et al. 1996: 122.

[28] See Edelmayer 1996: 50-4; Bakewell 1997: 302, 304, 311-4; Osterhammel 2001: 35. However, Spanish colonialism was less authoritarian and less efficient than is often supposed (Taylor 1979: 168).

[29] For a discussion of rebellions in the colonial peripheries of Mexico (New Spain) see Katz (1988b: 81-92).

[30] In Mexico the last large-scale rebellion threatening to extend to the centre of colonial power was the Mixtón War of 1541 (Gibson 1955: 586). In Peru, Manco Inka retained a government in exile in the Andean mountains until 1572 (Rowe 1957: 155f).

[31] See Taylor 1979: 113-51; Coatsworth 1988: 26, 31; Katz 1988b: 77-9, 93; Schroeder 1998b: xvii; Spores 1998; Glave 1999: 508f, 518, 520f.

[32] See, for example, Coatsworth 1988: 26-9, 36f; Katz 1988b: 77, 83-92; Deeds 1998; Karasch 1998.

[33] Wolf 1969; see also Adas 1979.

some truth in this argument, I would argue that it only partially explains the patterns of rebellion in colonial Latin America.

First of all, even the colonial core areas were governed by the Spanish Crown without a large army or police force. The capacity for control and repression, especially in the rural areas, was therefore limited. In addition, Indian communities had a somewhat more viable and less risky alternative to armed rebellion: they could go to court.[34] The Spanish judicial system was not free of bribery, corruption, or favouritism. In most areas, however, it remained sufficiently independent of local elite interests to convince countless Indians to pursue their concerns through the courts. The archives contain numerous examples of legal action taken by Indians and we know of many cases of successful lawsuits against Spanish colonists.[35] Consequently, the Crown was accepted as a remote but legitimate sovereign and a rightful arbiter of peasant grievances.[36] The rebellions that took place were directed at local officials "and the Indians mostly remained firmly convinced that the Crown, if it only knew, would redress their wrongs."[37]

In most cases, colonial officials were quick to negotiate settlements in village uprisings before they spread to other communities. Punishment was usually limited to exemplary sentences for a small number of alleged leaders. More often than not, the communities gained some redress of immediate grievances, such as tax reductions or the removal of offensive colonial officials.[38]

This period of relative "peacefulness" – that is, the relatively low incidence of large-scale collective violence – came to an end in the course of the eighteenth century. Several factors account for this change:

1) Due to the massive decrease of the indigenous population after the Conquest land was not a scarce resource in many parts of Latin America. The remaining population had to face massive changes in its settlement patterns and ways of life. In Peru alone, the Spanish viceroy Francisco de Toledo ordered that the whole indigenous population be resettled into so-called *reducciones*,

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[34] See, for example, Owensby 2008; Glave 1999: 527; Coatsworth 1988: 53. Taylor remarked for Mexico: "The colonial regime governed the countryside largely by not governing. The colonial bureaucracy was impressively large for its day and peasants generally acknowledged its legitimacy by flooding the high courts with petitions and complaints, protesting abuse of power rather than questioning the legitimacy of colonial sovereignty. On the other hand, the state machinery was spread thinly over the vast expanse of central and southern Mexico and it did not possess the means to coerce obedience everywhere at once. As a result, rural communities were allowed to make many of their own decisions" (1979: 165).

[35] See Taylor 1972: 108f; 1979: 168; Gibson 1984: 411; Coatsworth 1988: 54; Schroeder 1998b: xviif; Stavig 2000: 87-9, 97-111. Cf. Glave (1999: 517) for a more negative evaluation.

[36] See Taylor 1979: 170; Murra 1984: 125f; Katz 1988b: 79; Owensby 2008: 294, 300f.

[37] Katz 1988b: 79.

[38] See Taylor 1979: 169; Saignes 1999: 79; but cf. Coatsworth (1988: 49) who considers this tendency to have been more marked in Mexico than in Peru.

that were larger and more accessible settlements. Thus in a few years around 1.5 million Indians were congregated into towns that could be militarily controlled, administrated and Christianized more efficiently. Beyond this the resettlement freed new lands to be sold to Europeans by the Crown.[39] Beyond this, many Indians fled from their home communities and settled in others as "foreigners" (*forasteros*) to escape forced labour and the payment of tribute. However, by doing this they lost their rights to community lands.[40] The resettlement policies led to migration and vagrancy. People tried to escape from the forced labour in the mines or tribute payment some ending as dependent labourers on the haciendas of Europeans others concealed themselves and tried to evade their duties. Thus, in the late seventeenth century there were more *forasteros* than *originarios* in the Indian communities of southern Peru.[41]

Under these circumstances, the Spaniards could easily appropriate the unoccupied lands. What is more, in the beginning Spaniards were few and their interest to start agricultural production was limited. It was only after the mining industry had developed and the towns and cities had grown that a significant market for foodstuffs emerged. In the colonial core areas this demand could not be satisfied by the Indian village population which continued to decrease up to the mid-seventeenth century. The resulting scarcity led to rising prices for foodstuffs which stimulated the agricultural production on Spanish haciendas. At first, haciendas developed in thinly populated areas were cattle could be raised by small numbers of labourers. In other areas, where Spanish claims for land and labour competed with those of crown officials and Indian communities Spanish large estates were established later, in the Peruvian highlands, for example, they developed only in the eighteenth century.[42]

The competition for land increased as soon as the Indian population had begun to recover (around the middle of the seventeenth century in Mexico and a century later in Peru) and a growing number of Spaniards and mestizos began to establish large estates (haciendas) for agricultural production as a reaction to the growth of the internal market for foodstuffs due to the development of the mining industry and the increase of the urban population.[43]

2) Up to the late eighteenth century, the Spaniards did not have the resources to uphold their authority with immediate military means nor to secure the supply of native labour or tribute, even in the colonial core areas. Thus, for

[39] See Rowe 1957: 156; Gibson 1964: 268, 282-5; Stavig 2000: 91.
[40] See Spalding 1970: 662f; Farriss 1984: 158-64, 200-6; Glave 1999: 505f.
[41] See Murra, Wachtel and Revel 1986: 282.
[42] See Wolf 1982: 141-3; Florescano 1984: 159-64; Mörner 1984: 191-204; Stavig 2000: 90.
[43] See, for example, Taylor 1979: 146-51, 161; Campbell 1979: 5; Wolf 1982: 143; Florescano 1984: 159-64; Mörner 1984: 191-204; Patch 1993: 140-8; Glave 1999: 513; Stavig 2000: 90.

most of the colonial period, native intermediaries played a significant role in maintaining the colonial system. The prerogatives of indigenous nobles were therefore respected and a share of their town's tribute distributed accordingly. Native town councils had to collect taxes and select men and women for labour drafts.[44] Many Indian noble-men were allowed to bear the title "don", owned large tracts of land, held rights to tribute payments and had the right to bear arms. For many the situation improved compared to the pre-conquest period. They became rich in commerce or by cultivating European products and surpassed many Spaniards economically. John Murra describes the situation of the indigenous nobility in early colonial Peru as follows:

> Many a highland lord found himself temporarily richer and more powerful than he had ever been; they took readily to horses, firearms, and silk hose. They also started plantations of European crops – vineyards or barley. Most of the long-distance trade to the new mining centers was in their hands; they lent and borrowed money, employed Europeans as clerks and artisans, mastered reading and writing and even court behavior.[45]

In the course of the eighteenth century, however, the political and economic magnitude of the indigenous elite declined considerably due to significant administrative changes (Bourbon reforms) aimed at establishing effective government structures. Among other things, the Indian caciques and village community governors lost control of public revenues to Spanish officials. Since their judiciary functions were curtailed, they were reduced to mere tax collectors and largely robbed of political influence. In addition, village latitude for self-government became more and more limited.[46] Beyond this, tax collection became more efficient and the new taxes levied increased the effective burden Indian tributaries had to bear.[47] Finally, there is evidence that the courts decided more and more against the interests of indigenous communities.[48]

Consequently, local disturbances, riots, and rebellions increased dramatically in number and scope in the colonial core areas, especially after the mid-eighteenth century. This trend was particularly pronounced in the Andean

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[44] See, for example, Gibson 1955: 587, 590-2; McAlister 1963: 358f; Spalding 1970: 647f, 655-9, 661f; 1999: 936f, 939, 953, 956; Rowe 1957: 156f; 1982: 111-3; Murra 184: 124f; Saignes 1999: 64-8, 77-80, 86. Cf. also Whitehead 1999a: 869 for the Caribbean.

[45] Murra 1984: 125. See also Spores 1984: 100, 115f; Spalding 1999: 939, 953, 956; Saignes 1999: 67f, 70, 80; Gabbert 2004a: 23-5.

[46] See, for example, Farriss 1984: 356-66; Coatsworth 1988: 54, 58; Glave 1999: 541, 552-4; Saignes 1999: 71.

[47] See, for example, MacLeod 2000: 21. There is also some evidence suggesting that legal decisions in land disputes between Indian villages and haciendas shifted more and more in pro for the latter (Coatsworth 1988: 54).

[48] See, for example, Coatsworth 1988: 54.

region, where the greatest Indian[49] revolt in the history of Latin America broke out in 1780/81.[50] The rebellion was headed by Tupac Amaru II, a wealthy Indian nobleman and the head (*kuraka*) of several Indian communities. An estimated 100,000 people or approximately 8 per cent of the population in the area encompassed by the uprising lost their lives. Approximately 40,000 were non-Indians.[51]

From Colonialism to Post-Colonialism

In the 1820s the Latin American states gained their independence from Spain and Portugal. With the exception of Brazil – ruled by the Portuguese king's son as an independent empire since 1822 – all countries became republics. However, independence did not bring the self-rule of hitherto colonized people but domination by a new elite of American-born Spaniards (Creoles). The wars of independence were essentially conservative movements intended to prevent major social changes. Therefore, the legal discrimination of the indigenous population was removed only slowly and reluctantly. In many cases to preserve a special status for the Indians was aimed to provide cheap labourers for the growing commercial agriculture, in others the Indian tribute payments made up an important part of the government's income. In Yucatán, Mexico the re-establishment of the Indian republics was legitimated with the aim "to remove the obstacles for the collection of taxes, to contain the dispersion of the Indians in the forest, and to procure them an honest occupation making them useful for themselves and society."[52] In Peru and Ecuador the Indian tribute which had been abolished with independence, was re-introduced already in 1826 and 1828 respectively and survived until 1854 and 1857 respectively.[53]

Since the mid-nineteenth century the increasing influence of liberal ideas among the ruling elites in Latin America and the expansion of the commercial agriculture for export led to new and intense assaults on Indian community lands which were considered a major obstacle to an efficient capitalist production.[54] More and more, community lands were divided into lots and supposedly unoccupied land (*baldíos*) was privatized.[55] This applies also to some of the colonial borderlands such as the northern lowlands of South America (the

[49] In fact, this rebellion was, like several others, backed by a number of mestizos and even Creoles (Campbell 1979: 9; 1981: 682-9; Glave 1999: 520, 532, 544-8).
[50] Campbell 1979: 4-6; 1981: 682-9; Coatsworth 1988: 32 table 2.1, 35-8, 49; Katz 1988b: 80.
[51] See Glave 1999: 535 and Robins 2002: 70 for the figures and several contributions in Stern 1987, part I and II; Campbell 1979: 7-12; Golte 1980 for descriptions and analyses of the rebellion.
[52] Peón/Gondra 1832: 135, transl. W. G.
[53] See Jacobsen 1997: 130, 141; Guerrero 1997: 558, 568f; Larson 1999: 596f.
[54] See Hale 1986: 380-2; Larson 1999: 573-84, 623.
[55] See Tutino 1988; Jacobsen 1997; Larson 1999: 560-2, 567f.

lower Orinoco basin in Venezuela and British Guyana and the plains (*llanos*) of Venezuela and Columbia) where many Indians lost their community land to landlords or mestizo colonists and were reduced to dependant labourers on the large cattle ranches or sugar, coffee, and cacao plantations.[56]

Many Indians in the refuge areas were also affected by increasing attacks from the young Latin American republics and many groups such as the Mapuche in southern Chile or the Indians of the pampas and the Tehuelche in Argentina did lose their independence only in the second half of the nineteenth century.[57]

The Indian groups at the headstreams of the Amazonas (the Negro, Caquetà, Marañon and Ucayali rivers, among others), in the lowlands of Venezuela, Columbia, Ecuador, Brazil, Bolivia and Peru experienced a period of recovery due to the wars of independence and to the decades of political instability that followed since many Christian missions were abandoned, and colonization projects, forced relocations and enslavement came to a temporary halt. Some Indian groups even managed to recover areas they had lost during the colonial period. Along the upper Orinoco river alone more than 50 mission settlements were abandoned between 1830 and 1850.[58] However, the growing demand for forest products such as quinine and especially rubber led to a renewal of the governments' interest in the refuge areas as a potential source of products for exportation. Therefore, they began to establish military fortifications, fostered colonization and granted concessions for the exploitation of huge areas to national and foreign entrepreneurs. The exploitation and repression of the indigenous population reached a new culmination and many Indian groups were completely destroyed. Rubber barons controlled vast areas by private armies securing their labour force by the enslavement of Indians or debt peonage.[59] "By the beginning of the Rubber Boom, indigenous peoples were harvested like other natural resources, and gangs even raided the missions in search of workers."[60] By the end of the nineteenth century, for example, the indigenous population of the Llanos de Mojos in northern Bolivia that had reached approximately 100,000 in the eighteenth century was reduced to 20,000.[61]

The relatively long period of peace in the colonial core areas had been due to the limited population pressure on lands for cultivation, on the one hand, and especially to the role assigned to the indigenous population in the colonial society. Although the pacified Indians were relegated to a subordinate position, they were considered working and tribute paying subjects of the crown and

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[56] See Hill 1999: 712-4, 734-8.
[57] See Jones 1999: 173-83.
[58] See Hill 1999: 706-9, 740-2.
[59] See Hill 1999: 709-11, 714-6, 742-53, 758f.
[60] Hill 1999: 744.
[61] See Hill 1999: 710-11.

therefore as important parts of society. This began to change fundamentally with the Bourbon reforms and especially after Independence. In the young republics it was discussed how a culturally, socially, and racially heterogeneous society could be converted into a homogeneous nation. Among the elites it was widely accepted that the Indians and their institutions, such as communal lands, were unnecessary relics of the past and major obstacles to social and economic progress.[62] Consequently, military conquest and the extermination of the indigenous groups in the hitherto uncontrolled areas, such as parts of Chile, Argentina and Uruguay or the lowlands of Ecuador and Peru, were the main components of the republics' Indian policies. In the former colonial core areas, in contrast, cultural Hispanicization and assimilation of the Indians predominated.[63]

Considering these severe assaults on the material and cultural foundations of indigenous survival it comes as no surprise that even in the past colonial core areas collective violence increased dramatically in the course of the nineteenth century compared to most periods of colonial rule. The expansion of haciendas and plantations and the privatization of community or supposedly "unoccupied" land were main reasons for important revolts of Indian peasants in many parts of Latin America.[64]

Who Dunnit? Beyond the Colonial Dichotomy

Colonial societies are by definition structured around the dichotomy between colonialists and the colonized. These differences are generally reflected, for example, in the unequal distribution of political and legal rights. Thus, in Latin America Indians were regarded as minors and wards of the Crown, were obliged to pay tribute, and were liable for forced labour.[65] It would, however, be seriously misleading to regard colonialists and the colonized as homogeneous and united communities or to assume that conflicts always followed the colonial dichotomy.

This is especially true for the conquest period and the subsequent decades. As is well known, the conquest of the large indigenous empires began with the arrival of small numbers of Spaniards in the early sixteenth century. Hernán Cortés began his campaign against the Aztec ruler in 1519 with only 519 men. Francisco Pizarro was accompanied by no more than 180 Spaniards when he landed in the far north of Peru in 1532. The Aztec (Mexica) and Inca empires, however, were not firmly integrated or unified wholes. They were polities that

[62] See Hale 1986: 396-409; Gabbert 2004a: 64-70.
[63] See Farriss 1984: 286-352; Saignes 1999: 112-20; Schryer 2000: 232; Gabbert 2004a: 77f.
[64] See Reina 1980; several contributions in Stern 1987; Coatsworth 1988; Katz 1988c; Larson 1999: 641-54; Gabbert 2004b.
[65] See Zavala and Miranda 1954: 100, 107-13.

had emerged from a cycle of conquests carried out by certain indigenous groups in the early fifteenth century. The result was a complex structure of political subjection and economic exploitation dominated by the Inca and the Aztecs. Thus, the Spanish conquerors were able to take advantage of existing contradictions. In both cases, the Spaniards stumbled on a situation of political turmoil. A full-scale civil war over succession to the leadership of the Inca empire was raging in Peru, while the empire's elite in Mexico was also split as a result of power struggles between different factions. Those indigenous groups and polities most recently conquered by the Aztec and Inca empires or threatened with submission at the time of the conquest became the most important allies of the Spaniards.[66]

A similar pattern of Spanish or Portuguese and Indian alliances can be detected in many of the colonial frontier regions. In the coastal areas of Brazil, for example, many Tupi-Guarani groups allied themselves to the Portuguese or French to obtain fire-arms in the course of the sixteenth century to gain advantages in the frequent wars with their traditional indigenous enemies.[67] In Paraguay, the Guarani welcomed the first Europeans as allies in their defence against raids by the mounted Chaco-Indians.[68] In northern New Spain, Christianized Indians as well as Spanish missionaries and settlers had to defend themselves against incursions from the Apache and other nomadic groups.[69]

Apart from that, indigenous groups were frequently involved in the Indian slave trade, selling their war captives to Europeans.[70] This practice continued after the Latin American colonies' independence from Spain in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The massive spread of fire-arms in the lowlands led to an intensification and radicalization of violent conflicts within and among different indigenous groups. The desire to obtain guns or other manufactured goods such as iron cooking pots or steel knifes fuelled the hunt for members of neighbouring indigenous settlements who were then sold to European slave traders. The demand for exotic goods in Europe led to a hitherto unknown expansion of headhunting among the Jívaro in Peru and Ecuador between the 1860s and 1920s. Traders paid Jívaro warriors a gun for each shrunken head.[71]

While the indigenous groups which collaborated with the European conquerors have in retrospect mostly been portrayed as somewhat tragic auxiliaries of Iberian expansionism aiding their own subjection, from a sixteenth-century

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[66] See, for example, Gabbert 1995: 281-8 and 2010: 40-2; Spalding 1999: 922-6, 931.
[67] See Monteiro 1999: 991-7. For Yucatan see Restall 1998: 104-28.
[68] See Bakewell 1997: 243; Reff 1998: 20.
[69] See Guy and Sheridan 1998b.
[70] See, for example, Hemming 1984: 512, 519-30, 535; Whitehead 1999a: 893.
[71] See Hill 1999: 747-9.

perspective it seems more realistic to assume that both Spaniards and Indians alike endeavoured to use each other for their own ends.[72]

To understand the plausibility of such a claim, it should be recognized that the Spanish did not act as a unified force either. Various groups of conquerors fiercely disputed their claims to the newly subdued provinces. In Peru and Central America, for example, civil wars between the different Spanish factions, each backed by their respective native allies, endured for decades.[73] To interpret these conflicts exclusively as struggles among the Spanish is to adopt a colonial perspective since the majority of the warriors and auxiliaries were Indians. Similar to the examples mentioned above they aimed to gain strength in the conflicts with their fellow indigenous rivals by entering into alliances with one or the other Spanish faction.

Furthermore, European powers were struggling with each other in the scramble to control different parts of the New World. England, France, and the Netherlands disputed Iberian rights to the Caribbean Islands and even the American mainland. Spain and Portugal contended for control of the Brazilian hinterland. Amerindian warriors were employed in these conflicts by all sides.[74]

Even after the colonial system had consolidated the interests of the principal Spanish or Portuguese groups (the Crown, the church, and the settlers) remained different and, frequently antagonistic. Furthermore, the Iberians competed with each other individually about influence, land or other resources. Indian communities grasped this opportunity of defending their interests forming alliances with Spanish or Portuguese patrons. In their conflicts with local priests over the amount of religious dues or as a result of ill-treatment, for example, Indigenous communities were frequently backed not only by the courts but also by private Spaniards. Spanish patrons also appeared as advocates of their indigenous clients during land conflicts among Indian communities.[75]

Epilogue

Emphasizing native complicity in the colonial system by no means absolves Europeans from their responsibility for colonialism in Latin America as such or, more specifically, for the bulk of colonial violence. However, in view of the

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[72] I have developed this argument further in Gabbert 1995: 281f, 284-8; 1996: 73-6. For Peru see also Spalding 1999: 906-12.

[73] See, for example, Hemming 1970: 227-9, 233, 263, 268-72, 366-7; MacLeod 1973: 38-45; Spalding 1999: 927-9.

[74] See, for example, Floyd 1967; Wright/Carneiro da Cunha 1999: 318, 323, 326-7, 336, 348-54; Whitehead 1999b: 385, 409-24; Hill 1999: 708f, 739, Monteiro 1999: 997.

[75] See, for example, Dennis 1987: 140-5; Taylor 1994: 166-9; Saignes 1999: 80-2; Stavig 2000: 97.

fact that the Spanish and Portuguese remained a small minority throughout most of Latin America up to the end of the colonial period – in central Mexico, for example, still in 1821 Indians made up 70 per cent of the population, in Peru their share was 62 per cent in 1827 – this aspect seems crucial to the understanding of how colonialism was possible at all.[76]

In 1824, more than half a century before Europeans even began to subdue the African interior, Spanish colonial rule had already drawn to a close in mainland Latin America.[77] However, independence did not bring the self-rule of hitherto colonized people but domination by a new elite of American-born Spaniards (Creoles). The wars of independence were essentially conservative movements intended to prevent major social changes.

While Indians in the core areas were freed from colonial legal restrictions, they had to face new and intensified assaults on their communal lands, propelled by expanding capitalist agriculture. Thus, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were characterized not by less but probably more collective violence than during most other periods in the colonial era. The expansion of haciendas and plantations, and the expropriation of village lands provoked large-scale Indian peasant rebellions all over Latin America.[78] Beyond this, the independent Latin American states conquered the remaining Indian refuge areas, annihilating the last vestiges of native autonomy and decimating and sometimes even exterminating entire indigenous groups.[79] Thus, the nineteenth century can be considered as a period of a "second conquest".

Even in the 1970s, nomadic hunter-gatherers living close to or beyond the agrarian frontier were forced by South American governments to adopt a sedentary way of life. Others were – and occasionally are still today – simply killed by gunmen hired by local landlords, real estate speculators, or gold-diggers. This type of violence has often been justified as a somewhat regrettable but inevitable concomitant of civilization and progress. It is here, in the ideology that dehumanizes 'the other,' were the longue durée of colonialism can still be felt to the present day.

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[76] For the population figures see Schryer 2000: 229 and Larson 1999: 621.
[77] Brazil became an independent empire under the rule of the Portuguese king's son in 1822.
[78] See, for example, the overview in Coatsworth 1988; cf. also Reina 1980; several contributions in Stern 1987, part III; Katz 1988c; Gabbert 2004a and 2004b: 39-59.
[79] See, for example, Jones 1999: 173-83; Hill 1999:709-11, 714-6, 742-53, 758f.

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