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steps taken to avoid a negative impact on the cultural and religious life of the colony after the expulsion of the Jesuits paved the way for a society that in the future would become more secular and less conservative.

See also Convents in New Spain; Education; Inquisition; Missions; Twelve Apostles

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—PILAR GONZALBO AIZPURU

REPÚBLICA DE INDIOS

In many records of colonial Mexico, the terms *república de indios* (republic of Indians) and *república de españoles* (republic of Spaniards) appear with great frequency, often in legal and social contexts that assume two self-contained and fully segregated social or territorial units, one populated by Indians, the other by Spaniards, mestizos, Africans, criollos, and other non-Indian subjects. However, the various social, economic, and political practices recorded in colonial documents suggest that, while initially these two terms referred to two highly differentiated groups of people, by late colonial times this differentiation had been lessened in some domains (large settlements and their neighboring areas) and increased in others (in frontier regions and geographically isolated communities). Therefore, the term *república de indios* should be regarded as a bureaucratic concept for a set of legal dispositions—not always coherent with social realities—through which the Spanish Crown attempted to maintain a politically expedient territorial, legal, and social division between indigenous and nonindigenous peoples.

Fundamental Traits of the República de Indios

The scholar David Brading has pointed out that, in his 1516 *Memorial*, that Bartolomé de Las Casas presciently argued for the major social and political features that came to characterize the *pueblo de indios* (town of Indians): segregated indigenous villages directly controlled by Crown officials, with a

church and a hospital governed by a qualified priest, and a population subject to rotating, periodical labor obligations related to community needs and to labor-intensive colonial enterprises such as mining and manufacture. To this general framework, one should add land-tenure laws that restricted the sale of indigenous communal or private land to *vecinos* (non-Indian subjects), and land-tenure patterns that emphasized communal landholdings but allowed elites and influential Indian townspeople to usufruct some portions of land (i.e., to enjoy the fruits of another's possession). The Indian community could be a *cabecera* (the head of the smallest colonial administrative unit) or a *sujeto* (a dependency). *Cabeceras* had a resident priest who managed the doctrinal education, mass, and public registers and visited the *sujetos* periodically.

Indigenous people were accorded a separate status in legal and religious terms from that of all other colonial subjects. The rationale for this division rested on several factors. The rational and moral capacities of Indians as human beings were doubted by the theologian Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, defended by Las Casas, and eventually acknowledged by the Vatican; as colonial subjects, Indians were regarded as vulnerable and accorded the status of minors under the protection of the Crown; as new Christians, Indians were expected to falter in some observances of the faith. In the first half of the sixteenth century, before the dual legal spheres were formalized, Spanish law treated Indians as jurisdictional subjects:

they filed suits in the Royal Audiencia and were tried and punished for idolatry, sorcery, and apostasy by apostolic inquisitors Martín de Valencia in Tlaxcala (1524), Bishop Juan de Zumárraga and Visitador Tello de Sandoval in Nahua central Mexico and Oaxaca (1536–47), and Diego de Landa in Yucatán (1562). Torture and capital punishment were used sparingly against Indians, with one sole exception: Diego de Landa's 1562 investigation resulted in the death of about 160 Yucatec Maya and a protracted legal battle between Landa and Francisco de Torral, the first bishop of Yucatan.

When a separate Inquisition tribunal was established in Mexico in 1571, Indians were excluded from its jurisdiction, but Indian ritual specialists continued to be investigated and occasionally punished in a far less systematic manner by parish priests acting with the approval of their bishops. Indigenous litigiousness—an ingenious response to the new colonial order—was counteracted with the creation in 1592 of an exclusively indigenous tribunal, the General Indian Court, which provided Indians with legal assistance as needed and was funded with Indian taxes. As new Christians, Indians were allowed to keep only a partial fast during Lent and expected to keep only 10 holidays out of the 41 official calendar holidays. Furthermore, Indians were allowed to organize patron saint and other religious festivities in ways that departed from Christian orthodoxy and approached pre-Conquest modes of public celebration.

In most indigenous communities, sociopolitical stratification existed within two community domains—the local church and the *república* itself—and sometimes within a third domain—the *cofradía*, or religious fraternity, linked to but independent from the church. The top tier of each domain was controlled by colonial authorities. The Indians could elect lower-level local officers, who served in the town's *cabildo* (city council): there were two *alcaldes mayores* (mayors), about four *regidores* (city council members), an *escribano* (secretary), and one or more *mayordomos* (councilors). Although officials as a rule did not serve consecutive terms, in practice these positions were rotated among males with kinship ties to traditional elite groups or ambitious males who desired to increase their social standing; the amount of personal resources and responsibilities required for these offices acted as deterrents for the overburdened commoners. In fact, it was not unusual for a single individual to hold two higher-level political and church posts concurrently. The lowest tier in the political and religious domains featured a number of offices with various functions, such as tax collection, organization of crews for the mandatory labor taxes, edict proclamation, judicial activities, and church functions. Although this system of elite rotation may seem similar to the cargo systems described in many contemporary Mesoamerican communities since the 1930s, the transformation of the indigenous *cabildo* system into a coordinated system of socioreligious hierarchy may have taken place as late as the latter half of the eighteenth century. This transformation may have been related to two poorly understood social processes: the emergence of indigenous *cofradías* and the

development of communal resource management for the celebration of Christian calendrical holidays.

Indians were held responsible for a variety of obligations to the Crown and to the local community. A fixed monetary yearly tax was collected from each adult Indian; women were assigned a lower tax, which did not automatically translate into a reduced obligation, since they had unequal access to monetary income. Male Indians contributed a fixed amount of days of unpaid labor per year—often one full day per week—to various community and Crown projects. Community funds were held in a *caja de comunidad* with three keys with symbolic assignments: one for the Indian head of government, another for the priest, and the third one for the highest regional colonial authority. These labor and tax obligations were a heavy burden to most commoners. Labor service at regional mines and workshops contributed, along with epidemics, to the genocidal indigenous mortality rates of the late sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century, which reduced population levels in central Mexico—according to conservative estimates—to about one-fifth of the pre-Conquest population.

The República de Indios as a Colonial Project

As a colonial project, the *república de indios* featured an inherent contradiction between two goals: on one hand, it attempted to transform indigenous peoples into *gente de razón* (people of reason, a term the Spaniards expediently reserved for themselves), fully conscious of the superiority, value, and potential of Christianity and Spanish habits and mores; on the other, it strove to shield Indians—regarded as minors in legal terms—from the “bad example” given to them by greedy and corrupt Spaniards. This view prevailed in early colonial times; for example, in 1533, the *oidor* (local Crown representative) Ramírez de Fuenleal rejected a royal proposal for interracial *cabildos*, on the grounds that Indian officials would be corrupted by participating in them. Some distinguished mendicant priests, such as Vasco de Quiroga in Michoacán and Bartolomé de Las Casas in Vera Paz and Chiapas, attempted to create and maintain isolated, utopian indigenous communities where the Christian faith and a selection of Spanish mores were learned by peaceful and experimental means. By the late colonial period, however, the tide had turned, and Bourbon reformers called for generalized Spanish instruction and acculturation of rural indigenous populations.

A compromise between isolation and acculturation was achieved in the form of a policy of *congregaciones* (reductions), which began in the 1540s and extended into the early seventeenth century. The *congregaciones* incorporated Indians living in clustered small settlements into a preexisting or a new settlement with a church building and a resident priest. The resulting demographic center often was promoted to the rank of a *cabecera* (main township), and an indigenous town council was created. In this manner, the relative segregation of indigenous communities was combined with the social and didactic influence of a select representative—at least in theory—of Spanish morals: the parish priest.

Pueblos de indios in remote areas tended to function as segregated political and territorial units. For example, in remote areas with no resident priests—such as small townships in Yucatán—contacts with the Spanish colonial administration revolved around tribute collection and weekly doctrinal visits by a priest. Occasionally, territorial isolation and minimal numbers of nonindigenous residents afforded some *pueblos de indios* unusual political and religious autonomy, as in the case of the eight Yaqui townships established and supervised almost exclusively by Jesuits in northwest New Spain. However, major population centers—nominally a part of the *república de españoles*—attracted substantial numbers of indigenous migrants from neighboring pueblos. These migrants added additional layers to diverse urban communities, already highly stratified in terms of class and status. Therefore, by the mid-seventeenth century many urban centers substantially departed from the idealized *repúblicas* defined by colonial law. A case in point was the ethnically diverse, expanding category of *naborías* (semi-indentured servants) composed of Indian migrants to the city of Oaxaca in the seventeenth century.

The Emergence and Development of the *República de Indios*

The Caribbean *repartimiento* was the earliest form of Spanish colonial administration in the Americas. The 1513 Laws of Burgos defined the basic features of this system, which was brought over to New Spain in the 1520s as a more formalized labor and tribute extraction system called *encomienda*. In theory, *encomenderos* were entrusted a territory containing Indian communities for their instruction in the Christian faith and the collection of labor and tribute obligations for the Crown. In practice, the *encomenderos* proved to be an entrenched, feudal lot: they left doctrine to the friars, submitted their Indian charges to excessive obligations, and confronted the colonial bureaucracy. The Crown made various negotiated attempts to phase out *encomiendas*. First, it issued the New Laws in 1542, which abolished Indian slave labor, restricted *encomiendas*, and introduced residence requirements and the cancellation of family inheritance of *encomiendas* after one lifetime. The New Laws were met with resistance or noncompliance; however, vacant or disputed *encomiendas* were seized aggressively. By century's end, most *encomenderos* had been replaced with Crown-appointed *corregidores* in central Mexico. This transition was achieved by dividing the colony into midsize political entities called *corregimientos* or *alcaldías mayores*, where a *corregidor* or *alcalde mayor* maintained law and order, carried out royal orders, and collected tribute.

In the Late Postclassic period (c. A.D. 1200–1521), the political organization of many Mesoamerican communities was based on a concept of polity that comprised traditional lineages and landholding rights for each community, and the public worship of local deities and celebration of calendrical holidays. Each community had a hereditary ruler, and communities often formed a loose confederation with a defined territory and agreements for the rotation or sharing of politi-

cal leadership among member communities. Among the Nahuas of central Mexico, this confederation was called *altepetl* and its ruler was known as *tlahtoani*; among Yucatec Maya, the community ruler was the *batab* and the regional ruler was the *halach uinic*. Pan-regional arrangements—such as the Mexica state or the polities of the Purépecha, Mixtec, and Yucatec regions—rested on elaborations upon traditional notions of rulership and tribute.

After the Spanish Conquest and the political reorganization of central Mexico in the 1520s, the Crown had to contend with local lineages and traditional notions of rulership. Thus, it allowed for the appointment of what were called “natural lords”—lineage rulers—as both native rulers (*tlahoqueh*, *batabob*, etc.) and colonial rulers. This duality was reflected in the designation of a local ruler as “cacique and *gobernador*.” For the most part, the Crown did not interfere directly with the election of native rulers for the first two generations or so after the 1521 Conquest; however, it prepared the ground for their demise. Thus, a 1549 royal order called for the formation of *cabildos* for indigenous communities headed by Indian *alcaldes*.

The Crown seized the initiative at times of native inheritance crises, and inserted nonelite members and even outsiders into the local sphere as *gobernadores*, thus separating political authority from the office of the native ruler. The actual date of rupture with the lineage ruler varies with the region; it occurred in 1564 in Texcoco, approximately 1560 in Pátzcuaro, by 1560 in the Toluca Valley, and starting from 1579 in central Yucatán. This transition coincided with the replacement of mendicant friars with secular priests (i.e., those not belonging to a particular order) at the local level, a measure that placed Indian religious life under the control of the regional bishop. By the end of the sixteenth century, indigenous communities had been placed under the direct authority of the Crown and the centralized clergy: the province's Spanish governor appointed the Indian *gobernador* or cacique, and the parish priest appointed the church's *maestros cantores* (top church officials) and *sacristanes mayores* (deacons). In this manner, the Crown succeeded in mapping a regional political chain of command onto Indian communities without overtly replacing elite groups or triggering major rebellions in most regions.

Education, Language Policies, and Indigenous Segregation

Soon after their arrival in New Spain, leading mendicant priests such as Pedro de Gante, Andrés de Olmos, and Alonso de Molina began transcribing native languages in order to produce written doctrinal texts for the new evangelists. Initially, education and literacy in native languages were seen by mendicant orders as a way of providing Indians with a separate but parallel path toward their acculturation as model Christians. In 1536, the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco opened its doors to 60 children of Nahuatl noblemen who acquired literacy and rhetorical skills in both Latin and Nahuatl. The Colegio and similar Dominican and Jesuit

institutions provided a number of Indian elite members with superior literacy and rhetoric skills. However, colonial authorities and the centralized Catholic Church realized that widespread writing and literacy among the Indians was not a necessary goal for colonial administration and could erode Spanish cultural hegemony. Thus, by 1565, the Second Mexican Council demanded that all copies of doctrinal literature in circulation among the Nahuas be obtained directly from ecclesiastical authorities. By the end of the century, the stringent values of the Counter-Reformation had overcome the humanistic approach of the mendicants.

Nevertheless, the intellectual range covered by literate Indians educated by humanist friars in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century was remarkable: it included a Latin treatise on medicinal herbs, dozens of transcribed traditional Nahuas songs with historical or Christian content, the *Cantares Mexicanos*; native-language devotional plays for Christian holidays; accounts of historical and recent events written in Nahuatl or Spanish by native chroniclers Chimalpahin, Muñoz Camargo, and Alva Ixtlilxochitl; and even a Latin-Nahuatl bilingual version of *The Imitation of Christ*. A few written traditional Nahuatl incantations circulated clandestinely in west-central Mexico. In Yucatán, literate Yucatec Maya circulated copies of calendrical prophecies and rulership accounts in clandestine manuscripts known as *Chilam Balam* and authored a clandestine register of ritual and healing practices, the *Ritual of the Bacabob*. In spite of these achievements, formal literacy instruction for Indians and the production of texts in native languages declined toward the end of the seventeenth century.

A turning point in colonial attitudes toward Indian education occurred in 1769 when Archbishop Francisco Antonio Lorenzana y Butrón of Mexico requested the support of King Carlos III for the diffusion of Spanish as a second language for Indians. Lorenzana argued that language unity would secure the spiritual union of New Spain and that indigenous participation in national affairs would increase. Carlos III responded with a decree calling for an increase in the teaching of Spanish to Indians. However, this decree seemed too ambitious for Viceroy Antonio María de Bucareli, who was aware that rural education for either Indians or *castas* (those of mixed ancestry) was a prohibitively expensive task. Bucareli informed Carlos III of the impossibility of the project and offered instead to organize Spanish courses for Indians at the former Jesuit college of San Gregorio. In the end, reversing two centuries of enforced cultural and linguistic segregation proved to be an impossible task. Spanish instruction for indigenous people became available at a negligible number of institutions, and a wide language gap was preserved in many rural areas into the late nineteenth century.

Heterogeneity and Corporate Identity

In contrast with the more complex social status of urban Indians and *castas*, the relative independence and isolation of rural community residents allowed them to acquire a corporate identity. This identity—a result of the administrative

remapping of Indian communities through *congregaciones* and the confrontation between *cabeceras* and *sujetos*—became more and more localistic, fragmented, and politically irrelevant at a regional level. The rise in rural populations that began with the demographic recovery of indigenous communities in the mid-seventeenth century resulted in the creation of more pueblos in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. The creation of new pueblos and the redrawing of local boundaries often called for the submission of sixteenth-century *títulos primordiales* (primeval titles) establishing land rights given to the community by a Spanish court; this need resulted in the proliferation of freshly made *títulos*, which imitated the form, style, and content of earlier documents.

The basic requirements for obtaining pueblo status were a population of at least 80 families, a church building, and an adequate rationale, such as geographical isolation from the *cabecera*. These brand-new settlements assumed a corporate and localistic identity similar to that of *pueblos de indios*, which revolved around the local church, celebrations, and *cofradías*, even if not all of their families were of indigenous parentage. Paradoxically, even groups of people whose main ethnic background was not indigenous established settlements that shared social and religious traits with *pueblos de indios*. For example, the early northern Puebla community of Tenampulco, which disintegrated owing to depopulation in the late sixteenth century, lent its name to a new community that settled beside its abandoned church building in the mid-eighteenth century. Although the new community functioned virtually as a *pueblo de indios*, most of its residents were “*rancher mulattos*” rather than Indians. In this manner, the *pueblo de indios*—a social and political construct that had been meant to preserve a dichotomous colonial order—contributed toward the formation of strong localistic corporate identity in many towns in rural Mexico. This form of group identity has persisted despite numerous attempts at centralization and nation-building in independent Mexico.

See also Congregación; Indigenismo and Ethnic Movements; Indigenous Philologies; Inquisition; Limpieza de Sangre; Mestizaje

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—DAVID EDUARDO TAVÁREZ

RETABLOS

Mexico's numerous golden altarpieces constitute one of its greatest art treasures, not just because of their number and the precious materials of their construction, but because they are a product of such an intense religious faith that today it seems difficult to grasp the full meaning of these creations, even for Catholics.

Origins

The word *retablo* means "behind the table" in Latin. When priests began to celebrate Mass with their backs to the congregation, in the fifth century, portable structures were hung behind the table of the altar to hold and display the relics of martyrs and as a beautiful and worthy ornament. It is thought that the origins of altarpieces lie in reliquaries that slowly grew and gained importance in size and ornamentation, until today they are known as "icons," a Greek word meaning "image." The next phase was to add lateral wings, making them into triptychs (arrangements with three panels) and then polyptychs (arrangements with many panels), composed of icons with various leaves enabling the accumulation of images and decoration.

In the Romanesque period—the eleventh, twelfth, and part of the thirteenth centuries in Europe—the polyptychs, which had been made of wood, were covered with paintings, enamel, gold, precious stones, and carvings of bone and marble; by the Gothic period, they had become massive altarpieces with complicated symbolic ornamentation. It can be said that from the thirteenth century the monumental structure of these golden altarpieces was definitely incorporated into religious architecture.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Renaissance altarpieces appeared, and from the end of the sixteenth through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Baroque altarpieces flourished. These have, without doubt, the richest and most complex ornamentation, given the dynamism characteristic of this style. The challenge to Baroque art by the arrival of neoclassical art brought classicist altarpieces, which, as its name suggests, returned to austerity in structure and ornamentation. In Mexico altarpieces were constructed from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

Function

The original function of altarpieces had been to exalt the altar, but from the beginning they also performed a didactic function that became more detailed, notably in the Gothic and Baroque eras. In Mexico, a practical function sometimes was added.

The didactic function was achieved by the iconographic composition that narrated religious subjects such as landscapes, sacred history, the lives of saints, or interpretations of allegories or symbols of dogmas of faith or ecclesiastic hierarchy. All compositions were complemented by ornamental elements loaded with religious symbolism. In this way, the altarpieces functioned to transmit Christian doctrine and moralistic messages that the Catholic Church wanted to communicate to its faithful.

Master craftsmen also ingeniously took advantage of the structure of some of the altarpieces to solve functional needs. For example, the *reredos* (lattice-work of confessionals) was incorporated into the *retablo* without losing any of its beauty or primary function. The best examples of *reredos* are the confessionals in the Capilla del Colegio de las Vizcaínas in Mexico City, a girls' school. The *reredos* dedicated to Nuestra Señora de Aránzazu had two confessionals in the lower part of the lateral aisles, well disguised, where the "window" between the priest and the person confessing opened onto one of the corridors of the college, so that the priest could hear confessions from the pupils without ever seeing them. The *reredos* dedicated to Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe is more complicated. In the center of the first part of the *reredos*, the door opens toward the college and the gallery, located higher up; this allowed older or sick teachers to attend services. Another notable example is the beautiful *reredos* in the Church of Saint Augustine in Salamanca, where the second level of the *reredos* is a disguised lattice, as if covered in lace with a design of small stones, hiding the gallery for monks who—as in the previous example—either through age or infirmity could not come down into the church for services.

As works of art, the altarpieces attempted to be a primary representation of a divine world through iconographic