

FRONTIERS AND FANDANGOS:  
REFORMING COLONIAL NICARAGUA, 1759-1814

by

Cory L. Schott

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## Acknowledgments

Over the course of researching and writing this dissertation I have determined that, at least for me, good ideas or investigative leads really just 'happen' as a result of any of my very modest abilities. Rather, what sticks out in my mind is how productive a conversation with a colleague can be or how help in the archives from a kind researcher can translate into a big idea further down the road.

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Oregon Coast, Overlooking the Pacific Ocean

Summer 2014

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Abstract: Cory L. Schott

“Frontiers and Fandangos: Reforming Colonial Nicaragua, 1759-1808”

New ideas about trade, society, and the nature of government pulsed throughout the Atlantic World during the eighteenth century. This dissertation explores the relationship between political reforms and life along a colonial frontier. To do so, this project analyzes the effects of new laws imposed by the Spanish monarchy in Central America during the eighteenth century. The policies implemented during this time offered unequal prospects to social groups (e.g., Indians, merchants, soldiers, and farmers), state and non-state institutions (e.g., the Church, town councils, merchant guilds, and regional governments), and individuals to reconfigure traditional local power arrangements. This process, however, produced new conflicts between individuals, communities, and institutions as they attempted to expand and defend their traditional roles in society. I argue Nicaragua's relative isolation from the rest of the Spanish world allowed for the already complex and unwieldy process to become even more difficult. Thus, the majority of the reforms introduced over the eighteenth century remained poorly implemented. Even in areas where royal officials achieved noticeable progress and success, such as the creation of a tobacco monopoly, the new legal regime created new, often unforeseen, problems.

In the first part of my dissertation, I examine how vague (and sometimes contradictory) decrees from Spain provided opportunities for new expressions of local power. In the first chapter, I examine the effect that new laws limiting the power of the Church had on local officials and members of the clergy. For example, new ordinances

concerning the regulation of private gatherings and dances provoked a major conflict between two pillars of local rule: the bishop and the governor. In the second chapter, I analyze how new laws and decrees contributed to the expansion of an already flourishing black market. New economic ideas, such as ones that established royal monopolies, led to a significant increase in the remittances sent to Spain from Central America; however these same economic policies also eroded local economies and pushed some individuals to participate in illicit trade.

The second half of this study analyzes the colonial experiences of indigenous peoples in two very different areas of Central America. In the third chapter, I examine western Nicaragua, where Spanish rule was its strongest and indigenous communities struggled to defend themselves from increasingly onerous demands for labor and tribute. In the fourth chapter, I shift the view to eastern and central Nicaragua and Honduras, where Spain's presence was tenuous or non-existent. There, local indigenous groups capitalized on Spanish fears of a British presence in eastern Central America to extract major concessions and preserve their autonomy while individuals sold their services to the competing empires.

This dissertation draws on extensive work with sources, many hitherto untapped, at archives in Spain, Guatemala, the United States, and Nicaragua to demonstrate that residents of Spanish Central America—Spanish, American born Spaniards, natives, mulattos, and mestizos alike—contributed to new understandings of imperial goals that proved that some reforms could be flexible and amendable to local conditions. The legal battles, Church records, military reports, and pleas to the king also highlight shifting ideas about the political, economic, and social organization of society. Beyond its

contribution to the limited studies that focus on Nicaragua during the colonial period, my dissertation adds to the broader, comparative fields of colonial studies, economic history, the study of borderlands and frontiers, and the Atlantic World.

## Introduction

“Of the affairs in Nicaragua during the eighteenth century, little need be said.”—Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Central America*, vol. II, pg. 607

For most historians of the colonial period of Spanish America, which stretched from the late fifteenth century to the second decade of the nineteenth century, Bancroft’s words about late colonial Nicaragua ring as true today as they did in 1883. On the surface, the history of eighteenth century Nicaragua lacks the inherent appeal of, say, Mexico, Peru, or Nueva Granada. The urban areas of colonial Nicaragua remained small and relatively undeveloped compared to the administrative, residential, and religious centers constructed in larger cities. Nor was Nicaragua home to sources of fabulous mineral wealth, such as the mines of Potosí. No large scale battles for independence or major indigenous rebellions took place in it either. Nicaragua also lacked large numbers of settled indigenous peoples that colonial elites could exploit for wealth, such as central Mexico or Peru. Even for historians who study the Audiencia of Guatemala, the name Spain used for the administrative court that oversaw Spanish rule from Chiapas (in modern day Mexico) south to the Costa Rican border with Panama, colonial Nicaragua has generally remained outside their intellectual gaze. Aside from a few notable exceptions, scholars instead have focused on the Audiencia’s core area of Guatemala and, to a lesser extent, Salvador. If the Audiencia of Guatemala was, as some historians have suggested, a colonial backwater compared to other Spanish possessions in the Americas, then Nicaragua could rightfully claim status as a backwater of a backwater.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘backwater’ is often used to describe Spanish Central America, see Miles Wortman, “Bourbon Reforms in Central America: 1750-1786,” *The Americas* 32 (1975): 222-238.

Manuel Sánchez Duque, a merchant based in Nicaragua in the late colonial period, would likely agree with Bancroft's assessment. In a series of letters to his business partners in Peru from 1789 to 1791, Sánchez frequently referred to the poor economic state that the Central American colonies were in. In his quest to ship indigo to Peru in exchange for olive oil and wine that he would sell in Central America, he noted that the entire region was in a "deplorable" economic state. On more than one occasion, the lack of economic activity within the area took its toll on Sánchez's business. For example, in 1790, he reported back to his associates in Peru that the poor business climate resulted in them losing 400 pesos in a recent deal. Even though Sánchez and his family lived in Nicaragua, the few business opportunities in Nicaragua compelled him to focus his efforts in Guatemala. Sánchez also complained about the insufferable climate of Nicaragua. Writing to Domingo Zepeda, Sánchez explained that he and his family had "suffered a thousand diseases" in their years in Central America.<sup>2</sup>

Even marines and sailors on shore leave found Nicaragua less than appealing. In 1791, the commander of a world-wide scientific expedition, Alejandro Malaspina, noted in his logbook with some satisfaction that during their two week stay in the port of Realejo only one marine deserted.<sup>3</sup> While one deserter may seem like a lot, this was a

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<sup>2</sup> "Correspondencia gral. a la Ciudad de Lima y demas territorios del Peru desde el ano 1789 que tengo a saber. (hasta 11 febrero 1791. Pertenece a la viuda de Manuel Sánchez Duque)." Archivo Diocesano,[hereafter AD] Gobernación: Gobierno, 1791-1799, León, Nicaragua.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 3 will go into more detail on the purpose of this expedition. Many of the expedition's logs were translated in a three volume set. See, Andrew David, Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, Carlos Novi and Glyndwr Williams (eds.), *The Malaspina Expedition, 1789-1794: the Journal of the Voyage by Alejandro Malaspina*, translated by Sylvia Jamieson, London and Madrid, Hakluyt Society in association with the Museo Naval, 3rd series, no.8, Volume I, 2001, no.11, Volume II, 2003 and no.13, Volume III, 2005. Vol. II, pp. 25-31 deal with the voyage's time at Realejo. A thirty peso reward was set for the capture and return of deserters during the voyage. See doc. nos. 58, 60, 73, 197, and 201, "Malaspina expedition papers, 1789-1795", Mss 2814, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, Portland, OR.

vast improvement from previous stops. Earlier in the voyage, thirty-two sailors and marines jumped ship when they came ashore in Chile. After the expedition left Realejo, it headed to the Mexican port of Acapulco, where another nine tried to escape. While there were certainly other factors involved in their decision to leave (e.g., length of voyage, sickness, unfair treatment, etc.) it seems as though the crew of the expedition found little incentive to start a new life in Nicaragua.

The difficulties that Sánchez and his associates faced and the lack of interest from sailors and marines characterize a common complaint from late colonial merchants, royal officials, and potential immigrants. Few easily exploitable resources, (mineral, human, or otherwise) made Central America—and Nicaragua in particular—a less than desirable region to do business in, and provided few revenues for the Crown or new arrivals.

So why write a dissertation about eighteenth century Nicaragua? Despite Nicaragua's remoteness from centers of political power and anemic economic condition (and lack of interest from historians), many of the same historical processes that affected other parts of Spanish America—and the larger Atlantic world—played out in peripheral Central America in interesting and often unpredictable ways. Indeed, more often than not, because Nicaragua was a small, out of the way region with few resources, the effects of changes that Spain introduced into its colonies during the eighteenth century were sometimes more keenly felt. The time and distance that separated Nicaragua, Honduras, and Costa Rica from the rest of the Spanish world meant that a reform-minded governor, an over-zealous customs officer, or a frontier official could wield considerable authority and affect great change. At the same time, a fiery bishop or a merchant protecting his traditional revenue sources could frustrate attempts to change the status quo. While these

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processes also played out in other parts of Spanish America, the ease in which a small number of people—acting as either individuals or heading larger organizations—could promote or frustrate change makes southern Central America an interesting case study for how colonial era reforms were and were not implemented.

Beyond mere political and physical isolation, other historical circumstances specific to southern Central America, such as the presence of a large proportion of mixed-race peoples and its small and underdeveloped economy, make Nicaragua—as well as Honduras and Costa Rica—a unique site to consider the wholesale changes that took place in the late colonial period. External factors, also unique to Central America, such as the presence of a poorly understood frontier, a nearby population of British subjects, and a constant threat of invasion from the British or unconquered native peoples also shaped the ways in which officials applied reforms and informed local reactions to potential change.

The internal idiosyncrasies and external influences make Nicaragua an ideal site to explore the history of a crucial time in Latin American and World history. During the late eighteenth century, as new and enlightened ideas about trade, society, and the nature of government pulsed throughout the Atlantic World, European empires reconfigured many of the ways in which monarchies interacted with their subjects. Colonial populations reacted to these changes in a remarkable variety of ways, often informed by their own local experiences. The eighteenth century saw European powers try to increase revenues, centralize political authority, and strengthen the defense of their colonial possessions. In pursuit of these goals, the French, Portuguese, British, Dutch, and the

Spanish enacted a variety of new laws, royal decrees, and programs.<sup>4</sup>

Historians of various European empires have long examined these measures. For scholars of Latin America, the changes introduced during the late colonial era are generally referred to as the “Bourbon Reforms,” which lasted from around 1700, reaching its peak in the 1760s and 1770s, and lasting until the independence of most Spanish territories in the Americas in 1821. The Bourbon name comes from the House of Bourbon, which gained control of the Spanish monarchy after the last Spanish Habsburg king, Charles II, died without a direct heir.

Confronted with the loss of territory and power to other European states, the Bourbon kings and their policy-makers undertook a series of changes in the way that the Spanish Empire operated. These efforts included a series of moves designed to centralize political rule under the direct control of the Spanish Crown, bolster the defenses of the colonies, and increase the amount of money flowing into government coffers in Madrid. Several of the specific changes made by the Bourbons constituted a clear departure from the earlier Habsburg model of governance. Indeed, the desire for a clear departure with older forms of colonial administration and the influx of Spanish bureaucratic and military officials to the Americas became so pervasive that several scholars have referred to their efforts as an attempted re-conquest of America.<sup>5</sup>

Scholarship on the Bourbon period regularly contrasts their administration with earlier models of governance. The Habsburgs relied on compromise and flexibility to

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<sup>4</sup> For a primer on how these reforms shaped different colonial endeavors of European nation-states, see: Thomas Benjamin, *The Atlantic World: Europeans, Africans, Indians, and Their Shared History, 1400-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> David Brading, *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico, 1763-1810* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971): 29-30; John Lynch, *The Spanish American Revolutions, 1808-1826* (New York: Norton, 1973).

control the disparate and far-flung empire.<sup>6</sup> They frequently bowed to local traditions and political realities to maintain order. For example, in Central America, the Habsburgs allowed merchants in Guatemala City to monopolize commerce throughout the Kingdom of Guatemala because it was politically and economically expedient.<sup>7</sup> Aside from acquiescing to local rule, the Habsburgs rewarded loyal citizens and officials with political office and land. This system of rewards helped to promote stability over areas where royal authority was limited or nonexistent. Such rewards to individuals loyal to the Crown ensured that new areas would be brought under Spanish control. However, this system also encouraged local elites to take advantage of their authority as representatives of Spanish rule by enriching themselves. The Habsburgs tolerated a certain level of corruption, knowing that bureaucrats and tax collectors often demanded money on the side to increase their own wealth, as long as the central government received its due.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, by 1700, the Habsburg philosophy of flexibility had grown incredibly rigid as institutions, precedence, and petty corruption entrenched society and hindered new, more efficient methods of governance. Although these Habsburg practices never truly died out, the Bourbon kings tried to improve and modernize the manner in which they ran their empire. Their approach shifted from the Habsburg tradition of loyalty and control to

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<sup>6</sup> Murdo MacLeod, *Spanish Central America: A Socioeconomic History, 1520-1720*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. See also, Troy S. Floyd. "The Guatemalan Merchants, the Government, and the Provincianos, 1750-1800" *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 41, No. 1. (Feb., 1961), pp. 90-110.

<sup>8</sup> Miles Wortman, *Government and Society in Central America 1680-1840* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). According to Wortman, tax collectors only had to fill quotas for the royal government. Whatever else they made, the tax collectors could keep. More recently, Ruth Hill has explored this topic in *Hierarchy, Commerce, and Fraud in Bourbon Spanish America* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), which demonstrates how corrupt practices persisted well into the Bourbon era.

efficiency, profitability, and uniformity.<sup>9</sup>

Generations of historians have largely attributed the arrival of the Bourbons on the Spanish throne as an event that ushered a distinct, albeit protracted, age of modernization and reform within the Spanish empire. Scholars have argued that much of the inspiration of the Bourbon Reforms came from the apparent success of French and English policies and philosophies of governance. This stimulation was further enhanced by the close family ties between the French and Spanish royalty.<sup>10</sup> With the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, the Spanish throne passed to the nephew of the King of France. Thus, members of the house of Bourbon ruled both France and Spain and provided an important avenue for ideas and philosophies to pass from one country to the other. Finally, Spanish intellectuals and bureaucrats that studied in France, along with French intellectuals employed by the Spanish government, brought with them an attitude towards reforming the economic and political structure of Spain and its empire to more closely resemble other European nations.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, some scholars have downplayed the significance of Frenchmen in the pay of the Spanish monarchy. For example, Allan J. Kuethe and Lowell Blaisdell have suggested that the French in Spain, along with French intellectual currents, had only marginal effect upon Bourbon kings.<sup>12</sup>

Although royal bureaucrats and intellectuals recognized the need for change, the majority of reforms were not realized in the Americas until Charles III became king

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<sup>9</sup> MacLeod, *Spanish Central America: A Socioeconomic History, 1520-1720*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008. p.170.

<sup>10</sup> Brian R. Hamnett, "Constitutional Theory and Political Reality: Liberalism, Traditionalism, and the Spanish Cortes, 1810-1814" *The Journal of Modern History*, 49 (1977)

<sup>11</sup> Pedro de Campomanes, José Monio, José de Galvez are just some of the Spanish intellectuals whose influence can be seen in policies.

<sup>12</sup> Allan J Kuethe and Lowell Blaisdell, "French Influence and the Origins of the Bourbon Colonial Reorganization", *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (Aug., 1991), pp. 579-607

(1759-1788). Several factors contributed to the slow pace of change in Spanish policy towards the New World. Before alterations took place in Spain's colonies, Philip V (1700-1746) and his ministers took steps to more effectively govern Spain itself. They reduced internal customs between the constituent kingdoms, established government-supported factories, induced foreign specialists and intellectuals to move to Spain, and established tougher protective duties over domestic industry.<sup>13</sup> This delayed implementation of the reforms elsewhere as the monarch and his ministers focused their efforts on Spain during the early years of Philip's reign. In the Americas, the protection of self interests at the personal and bureaucratic levels hampered reforming efforts as individuals within and outside the state apparatus actively opposed reforms that would have hurt them economically or politically.

Much of the scholarship on the Bourbon period in Spanish America has focused on the relative success or failure of these reforms to generate revenues for the Spanish state or have largely restricted themselves to institutional histories in core areas of Spain's colonial empire, such as in Mexico City or Lima.<sup>14</sup> Recent scholarship has shifted some attention away from analyzing the effectiveness of these changes to the study of different themes. Notably, scholars have begun to explore the cultural and social changes that occurred with the introduction of reforms and have examined how other activities, such as sending scientific or botanical expeditions to colonial possessions, also served to bring the ideals of the Enlightenment to imperial governance. Other studies have examined local responses to some of the reforms in certain areas of South America and in

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<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the reforms undertaken in Spain, see Earl J. Hamilton, "Money and Economic Recovery in Spain under the First Bourbon, 1701-1746", *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 15, No. 3. (Sept., 1943), pp. 193-194.

<sup>14</sup> Mark A. Burkholder and David S. Chandler. *From Impotence to Authority—The Spanish Crown and the American Audiencias, 1687-1808*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1977).

parts of Mexico, such as Oaxaca, Yucatan, Chihuahua, and above all, Mexico City.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, a large number of studies have examined what role, if any, these reforms played in fostering independence movements and have explored how they may have informed many of the protracted social and civil conflicts in the post-independence period.<sup>16</sup>

In "Bureaucracy and Business in the Spanish Empire, 1759-1804: Failure of a Bourbon Reform in Mexico and Peru", Stanley Stein argues that merchants and bureaucrats in the New World could and often did conspire to block the implementation of reforms that they saw as detrimental to their vested interests.<sup>17</sup> This slowed the pace of reform throughout the Bourbon era and helped to negate some of the changes in government that took place. Charles III confronted many of the difficulties left over from the Hapsburg era. Although some scholars like Stein have questioned the extent of the impact of the reforms or whether their implementation actually accomplished any positive goal, there is little doubt that the Bourbon reforms, especially those initiated by Charles III, changed the relationship between Spanish central authority and its colonial

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<sup>15</sup> For example, see Peter Guardino, *The Time of Liberty: Popular Political Culture in Oaxaca, 1750-1850* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Robert Patch, *Maya and Spaniard In Yucatan, 1648-1812* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Cheryl English Martin, *Governance and Society in Colonial Mexico: Chihuahua in the Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Sharon Bailey Glasco, *Constructing Mexico City: Colonial Conflicts Over Culture, Space, and Authority* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Jaime E. Rodríguez O., *The Independence of Spanish America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> Stanley J. Stein, "Bureaucracy and Business in the Spanish Empire, 1759-1804: Failure of a Bourbon Reform in Mexico and Peru", *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 61, No. 1. (Feb., 1981), pp. 2-28. It is important to note that scholars have questioned the validity of Stein's arguments. Jacques A. Barbier and Mark A. Burkholder observed that Stein overstated the failures of the Bourbons, "Critique of Stanley J. Stein's "Bureaucracy and Business in the Spanish Empire, 1759-1804: Failure of a Bourbon Reform in Mexico and Peru"". *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 62, No. 3. (Aug., 1982), pp. 460-468. For Stein's reply to the criticisms, see Stanley J. Stein, "Stanley J. Stein's Reply", *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 62, No. 3. (Aug., 1982), pp. 469-477.

population at all levels of society.<sup>18</sup>

Much like the scholarship on the rest of colonial Spanish America, historians of the Audiencia of Guatemala have also explored the application of the Bourbon Reforms in Central America. In his classic study of the region, Miles Wortman argued that however energetic the reforming spirit of the Bourbon officials were, they had to face the cold reality of an entrenched political, social, and economic system that was united in their own self-interest against any change.<sup>19</sup> Héctor Pérez-Brignoli's concise history of Central America argues that while the reforms undertaken in the Audiencia of Guatemala might seem insignificant compared to the rest of Spanish America, their cumulative effect within the Audiencia was quite radical—ultimately setting those aligned with existing monopolies and structures against “provincials” looking to bypass these old forms.<sup>20</sup> The study of the Bourbon period in Central America also reflects another trend within the larger field of colonial Spanish history in that it (quite naturally) has emphasized the actions of people and institutions located in population and administrative centers. Severo Martínez Peláez and Christopher H. Lutz, for example, have thoroughly documented Spanish administration in Guatemala in their efforts to understand the connections between race and economic power in the colonial past. These two works, and others like them, reflect how both local and foreign historians have gravitated towards the study of the Guatemalan heartlands over other areas within the

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<sup>18</sup> Another example of the relative ineffectiveness of the Bourbon Reforms for other regions may be found in *Reform and Insurrection in Bourbon New Granada and Peru*, edited by John R. Fisher, Allan J. Kuethe, and Anthony McFarlane.

<sup>19</sup> Miles Wortman, *Government and Society in Central America, 1680-1840*

<sup>20</sup> Héctor Pérez-Brignoli, *A Brief History of Central America*, Berkeley: University of California Press: 1989. Pp. 54-65, *passim*.

Audiencia.<sup>21</sup>

The scholarship on colonial Nicaragua is considerably less developed than the historiography of Guatemala and even Costa Rica.<sup>22</sup> This has as much to do with the availability of local resources and funding as it does with interest in the area's history. In terms of depth and sophistication, the most important work on colonial Nicaragua has been done by Germán Romero Vargas. Several of his works, most notably *Las estructuras sociales de Nicaragua en el siglo XVIII*, have explored the cumulative effects of Spanish colonialism within Nicaragua. Romero Vargas uses archival sources to provide a detailed analysis on how the economic and administrative institutions put in place by the Spanish shaped different segments of the populations: from various Indian groups and Spanish officials to the growing populations of mulatos and mestizos.<sup>23</sup> Historians from further afield, such as Linda Newson and David Radell, have also studied Nicaragua's colonial past. Newson's work examined how Indian communities of Nicaragua encountered and endured systematic attempts by the Spanish to appropriate their wealth and labors in the face of massive demographic losses brought on by war and disease.<sup>24</sup> Radell's studies, on the other hand, have focused more on Nicaragua's ports and the region's access to external markets. Robert Patch has also recently completed a

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<sup>21</sup> Severo Martínez Paláez, *La Patria del Criollo: An Interpretation of Colonial Guatemala* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009) and Christopher H. Lutz, *Santiago de Guatemala, 1541-1773: City, Caste, and the Colonial Experience* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> An exception to this trend is the scholarship on the Mosquito Coast, which will be covered in detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>23</sup> More so than other Nicaraguan scholars of his generation, Germán Romero Vargas relies less upon the practice of extensively quoting colonial or nineteenth chroniclers. Instead, Romero Vargas provides an analysis of primary and secondary sources. See his exemplary *Las estructuras sociales de Nicaragua en el siglo XVIII* (Managua: Editorial Vanguardia, 1988) and *Las sociedades del Atlántico de Nicaragua en los siglos XVII y XVIII* (Managua: Fondo de Promoción Cultural-Banic, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> Linda A. Newson, *Indian Survival in Colonial Nicaragua* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987)

study on how Spain compelled indigenous people to participate in the global economy.<sup>25</sup>

While Patch's book examines all of the Audiencia of Guatemala, it has excellent coverage of how Bourbon officials in Nicaragua used and misused their authority to enrich themselves and their sovereign.

### **Setting the Scene**

The geography and precolonial history of Central America contributed to Bourbon understandings of the region and guided how they would pursue reforms. At the same time, knowledge of geography and history shaped allowed local actors to adapt to and in some cases challenge the new reforms put in place by Enlightened officials.

Punctuated by a chain of volcanic mountain peaks, the Central American isthmus stretches from southern Mexico to South America. The volcanoes—and the supporting cast of mountains, hills, and highlands—are part of the continental divide that forms the isthmus' spine by running from the north and west to the south and east and define the land. Although occasionally destructive, the volcanoes provide rich, productive soils and are potent reminders of the tectonic pressure that lifts over half of the region to elevations above 500 meters and much of it to heights greater than 1,000 meters. This elevation means that despite being located entirely within the tropics, the elevated portions of Central America can be much cooler than areas at sea level. The changes in elevation create a myriad of climates and biologically distinct environments within a relatively confined space. Although not as extreme as the well-recorded differences between the valleys and peaks of the Andes, the different biomes and environments that one can encounter between the warm and humid coasts and the tops of the cloud-covered

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<sup>25</sup> Robert Patch, *Indians and the Political Economy of Colonial Central America, 1670–1810* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013)

mountains allows for a significant variation in the types of plants and animals, which in turn affects the ways in which humans interact with the environment.<sup>26</sup> The steep and rugged spine of Central America also divides and isolates portions of the region. During the colonial period, the distances and physical isolation from one region to the next drove transportation costs up and led to difficulties in governance.

The region's distinctive outline comes from the Caribbean Sea to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the south and west. Inland freshwater lakes and waterways, especially Lake Nicaragua (also known as Lake Cocibolca) and Lake Managua (Lake Xolotlán), dominate the landscape of Southern Central America. The San Juan River, which flows out of Lake Nicaragua and to the isthmus' eastern shore provides an important outlet to the Caribbean Sea, although the presence of rapids and seasonal rains made any colonial voyage difficult without significant portage and good timing. The region's other main water outlet to the Caribbean, Guatemala's Golfo Dulce, offers another route, although this too had its own drawbacks, being far from population centers in the Guatemalan highlands. Other rivers, especially those of northern and central Nicaragua, such as the Río Coco (also known as Río Segovia and Wanks River) also drain to the Caribbean and have been used for transporting goods and people for thousands of years. In Costa Rica, the most important colonial era waterway was the Matina River, which flowed east from the central mountain range to the Caribbean. The fertile valley that the Matina River produced created an ideal location for the production of cacao, and it became the leading export center for cacao in Southern Central America by the eighteenth century. The shallow depths and quick currents of Central America's eastern rivers have meant that

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<sup>26</sup> Frank Salomon, "A North Andean Status Trader Complex under Inka Rule" *Ethnohistory*, 32(1), 1987, p. 63-77

traditionally only small dugout canoes could be used. Along the Pacific coast, a lack of navigable rivers, persistent northerly winds for half of the year (named the Papagayo or Guanacaste winds), and the limited number of natural harbors influenced how indigenous peoples and later peoples interacted with the waters of the Pacific.

One common way of imagining the different environments of Central America has been to divide it into three different climate zones. Dating back to the arrival of the Spanish in the sixteenth century, and largely continuing to this day, scholars and residents often describe the three distinct zones as: *tierra caliente*, *tierra templada*, and *tierra fría*. These terms act as a shorthand way to describe vast areas that have a few things in common, typically elevation, number of grain harvests, and temperature—although there is considerable room for local interpretations. *Tierra caliente*, or hot lands, is the term Spaniards used to describe the warm and humid low-lying areas typically found throughout Caribbean and the coastal Pacific. In Central America, *tierra caliente* is used to describe lands near both coasts and for most of the low lying areas of eastern Nicaragua and Honduras. During the colonial period, Spaniards believed that living in *tierra caliente* was hazardous to one's health and productivity, so they typically avoided living along the coasts. At the other end of the spectrum lies *tierra fría*, or cold lands. Typically, *tierra fría* was the name given to areas high in the mountains, where only one harvest could be achieved and where temperatures could become quite cold. *Tierra templada*, or temperate lands, are located usually between 500 (sometimes as low as 200) and 2,500 meters. These areas have the ability to have more than one harvest a year—sometimes as many as three—and have the characteristic of having temperate climates throughout the year, never getting too hot or too cold. These areas usually supported the

largest pre-colonial and colonial populations.

A notable exception to the pre-colonial and colonial trend of the largest populations inhabiting the temperate parts of Central America were the Pacific coastal plains of Nicaragua. Running from the western shores of Nicaragua's two great lakes to the Gulf of Fonseca, the Pacific coastal plains rarely rise above 50 meters and average high temperatures can be quite warm—often above 32° C (90° F) for most of the year. Although warmer than most areas of Spanish settlement, the Pacific coastal plains held two related qualities that compelled the Spanish to endure the heat. First, the volcanic qualities of the soils made the coastal plains fertile ground for agriculture. Once the local climatic conditions were understood and adequate water sourced, it was possible to plant two crops in a single year. The fertile grounds that drew the Spanish to the Pacific coastal plains had also drawn for centuries large numbers of indigenous peoples to western Nicaragua. Indeed, it was the presence of large numbers of indigenous peoples that, over time, had organized themselves into several hierarchical bands, chiefdoms, and kingdoms was the second and most enduring reason as to why the Spanish settled western Nicaragua.<sup>27</sup>

The indigenous peoples that inhabited Nicaragua, Honduras, and Costa Rica at the end of the fifteenth century were comprised of culturally, linguistically, and socially distinct and diverse groups. Nonetheless, there are some general qualities that scholars have examined that allow researchers to make comparisons and generalizations. Unlike the three climatic zones discussed earlier, the region is usually framed as two distinct

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<sup>27</sup> See the scholarship done by the archaeologist Geoffrey G. McCafferty. His work has shown how indigenous cultures in Nicaragua transformed as migrants from Central Mexico came to the isthmus in Classic and Post-Classic periods (500-1250 CE). See, for example, McCafferty and Carrie Dennett, "Ethnogenesis and Hybridity in Proto-Historic Period Nicaragua" *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 28(1): 189-212.

areas. While acknowledging the diversity of Pre-Columbian cultures, most scholars group the indigenous peoples of Central America into two groups, a Mesoamerican cultural group dominated by Mayan and Nahuatl-speaking peoples and a South American cultural group comprised of mostly Chibchan-speaking peoples.<sup>28</sup> Generally, the Mesoamerican peoples cultivated corn, beans and squash; lived in complex hierarchical societies; collected or gave tribute; and had higher population densities. The South American cultures tended to raise manioc in semi-cultivated patches; had smaller population densities; and had fewer levels of social differentiation compared to the Mesoamerican groups.

The frontier dividing the Mesoamerican and South American cultural zones was neither static nor universal. For example, some groups within the South American zones cultivated maize while some groups living in the Mesoamerican zones lived in small, scattered settlements. Nonetheless, most scholars have identified the mountainous portion of central Nicaragua—with some variation—as a transition area between the Mesoamerican and South American zones.<sup>29</sup> A sixteenth century Spanish chronicler, Fernandez de Oviedo, argued that around the time of the arrival of the Spanish there were five distinct groups of indigenous peoples, numbering around 600,000 people in total.<sup>30</sup> Demographic studies have explored this topic in detail, with a range of figures given for various Central American locations. For example, Germán Romero Vargas argues that there is enough historic and archeological evidence to suggest that there were at least

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<sup>28</sup> Older texts often use the term Carib. The Chibchan family of languages extends from Honduras to much of northern South America.

<sup>29</sup> See Newson, *Indian Survival*, pg. 23-41 for a complete discussion of the linguistic and cultural areas of Nicaragua.

<sup>30</sup> MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*, 53.

100,000 people in western Nicaragua at the time of European arrival.<sup>31</sup> In an excellent summary of existing demographic studies on pre-colonial Nicaragua, Linda Newson, using documentary evidence and calculations on the carrying capacity of various types of soils, argues that the population for all of pre-colonial Nicaragua was somewhere between 825,000 and 1,650,000 people.<sup>32</sup> Regardless of the totals, what is clear is that the totals for the eastern portion for southern Central America—extending from the eastern slope of the central mountains to the Caribbean coast—were below the population totals for the central and western areas of southern Central America.<sup>33</sup>

Although Christopher Columbus spotted the eastern shore of Nicaragua during his fourth voyage to the Americas in 1502, it was not until the second decade of the sixteenth century that Southern Central America experienced sustained contact with Europeans. As the area was a convergence zone for environments and indigenous peoples, it is only fitting that bands of Europeans approached southern Central America from the north and the south. From the south, groups of conquistadors and explorers left Spanish settlements along the Spanish Main and headed north, through Costa Rica and into Nicaragua. From the north, groups of conquistadors under the command of Hernan Cortes left central Mexico and traveled south, accompanied with thousands of indigenous allies, first adventuring into parts of Chiapas and Guatemala, and then into Honduras and Nicaragua.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Romero Vargas, *Persistencia indigena en Nicaragua*, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> Linda Newson, “The Depopulation of Nicaragua in the Sixteenth Century” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 14 No. 2, 1982, p. 259.

<sup>33</sup> Newson proposes that eastern Nicaragua had a population between 38,000 and 75,000 people.

<sup>34</sup> The Lienzo de Quauhquechollan, a conquest-era map provides a view of how the Nahuatl-speaking groups that accompanied Pedro de Alvarado (a lieutenant of Cortez) saw their role in the conquest of Guatemala. See also: Florine Asselberg, *Conquered Conquistadors: The Lienzo de Quauhquechollan, A Nahuatl Vision of the Conquest of Guatemala* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2008); Matthew

The differences of climate, language, and culture among the pre-colonial peoples of Central America compared to other areas of Spanish America, such as central Mexico or Peru, has led some scholars, such as Pérez-Brignoli, to suggest that the fractured nature of Central American indigenous groups contributed to a bloody, devastating, and protracted conquest.<sup>35</sup> He argues that instead of one set of elites that the Spanish had to either co-opt or defeat, the Spanish felt compelled to wage war against each independent group, usually with bloody results. However formidable the Spanish and their allies were, the real force behind the conquest was disease. Preceding the arrival of the Spanish soldiers and adventurers, waves of disease swept through Central America killing off large percentages of towns and villages.<sup>36</sup> The Spanish were able to take advantage of political, social, and military disintegration caused by disease outbreaks in order to defeat any armed resistance as they moved into Central America. Importantly, the Spanish did not venture into the central and eastern portions of southern Central America. There were no large groups of settled indigenous populations to convert or demand tribute from nor were there any precious metals to mine. Further dissuading the Spanish and other European colonial powers was the climate of the eastern tropical forests of Central America, which they saw as unhealthy and unproductive lands.

Spanish settlement patterns during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in the Americas focused less on founding cities situated in ideal locations for commerce or agriculture but rather directed their efforts to establishing cities near, next to, and

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Restall and Flornie Asselberg, *Invading Guatemala: Spanish, Nahua, and Maya Accounts of the Conquest Wars*, (College Station, Penn State University Press, 2008); and Laura Matthew, *Memories of Conquest: Becoming Mexicano in Colonial Guatemala* (Durham, North Carolina Press, 2012)

<sup>35</sup> Pérez-Brignoli, *Brief History of Central America*, p. 34-35.

<sup>36</sup> Smallpox, influenza, measles, typhus, and the plague all made appearances in Central America. See George Lovell, "'Heavy Shadows and Black Night': Disease and Depopulation in Colonial Spanish America", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 82, No. 3, (1992), pp. 426-443.

sometimes on top of existing population centers. In Central America in the 1520s, the Spanish expedition led by Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba established the Spanish cities of Granada and León (later destroyed and moved) not for their proximity to water or trade routes, but rather so that the Spanish could better control and exploit native peoples of their labors and more efficiently gather tribute.<sup>37</sup> Despite the founding of Spanish cities in Central America, proper “empire building” (e.g., setting up institutions and actually living in the permanent settlements) did not begin for some time after the initial phase of conquest because the conquistadors had no ambitions to do so. Rather, they focused their endeavors on forming new expeditions to other parts of the Americas for greater profits.<sup>38</sup>

In Nicaragua, more so than other locations, the Spanish sought to turn the populations of indigenous peoples into a source of quick wealth. Despite a number of laws and decrees forbidding the practice, for over two decades Spanish subjects enslaved entire populations of Indian communities in order to sell them as porters or miners—most often in Panama and Peru.<sup>39</sup> It is unclear how many Indian slaves the Spanish exported from western Nicaragua. MacLeod reports a “conservative” estimate for the totals at around 200,000 slaves between the years 1528 and the late 1540.<sup>40</sup> William Sherman casts doubt on MacLeod’s number of Indian slaves sent to Peru, arguing that the limitations of the number of ships and seasonal conditions make it unlikely that 200,000 were transported south on the Pacific. Sherman argues that a more realistic number is

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<sup>37</sup> See Patrick S. Werner, *Epoca temprana de León Viejo: Una historia de la primera capital de Nicaragua*. Managua: Fondo Editorial INC-ASDI, 2000.

<sup>38</sup> Many of the Spanish conquistadors ultimately left Nicaragua for Peru.

<sup>39</sup> Spanish slavers used legal pretexts for the enslavement of Indians in Nicaragua. See William Sherman, *Forced Native Labor in Sixteenth-Century Central America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979).

<sup>40</sup> MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*, pg. 52.

50,000 slaves exported.<sup>41</sup> The fate of these slaves is even less well-known. Bartolomé de las Casas, the Dominican who railed against Spanish abuse of the indigenous populations in the latter part of his life, wrote that between 1523 and 1533 “six or seven” ships departed Nicaragua “to be sold in Panama and Peru, where they all perished.”<sup>42</sup> When one totals the numbers of indigenous peoples killed due to war and disease and then adds to that number the tens of thousands exported as slaves it should come as no great surprise that by the mid sixteenth century Spaniards complaints about the lack of Indian tributaries reached a crescendo.

The quick and near complete depopulation of indigenous peoples in western Nicaragua influenced the rest of the colony’s historical trajectory. Aside from a few communities, such as Subtiava and Masaya, few original large Indian population centers remained in Pacific lowlands. The practice of *reducciones* (literally: reduction), a process which brought remaining Indians who were living in scattered locales into smaller towns so that the Spanish could more easily control them and extract wealth from them, curtailed the diversity of indigenous peoples and brought them into greater contact with both disease and the exploitative practices of Spanish officials gathering tribute. The relative absence of indigenous communities in western Nicaragua, the Costa Rican highlands, and western Honduras compared to pre-colonial populations also shaped how the Spanish worked the land. Like other areas of Spanish America that faced a rapid population loss, activities such as ranching replaced more labor-intensive industries such as large-scale farming. Even profitable commodities, such as cacao and indigo, failed to truly take off in the area because they required large inputs of cheap labor. There simply

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<sup>41</sup> Sherman, *Forced Native Labor*, pg. 74-82.

<sup>42</sup> Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (New York: Penguin, 2004) pg.40

were not enough indigenous peoples to both produce foodstuffs and commodities for export. Although they may disagree on the numbers of exported slaves, MacLeod, Newson, Sherman, Romero Vargas—along with contemporary witnesses—all noted a clear decline in the Nicaraguan slave trade.<sup>43</sup>

The first forty years of contact and conquest in the southern portions of the Audiencia of Guatemala influenced how the “long seventeenth century”, that is, from around 1570 and 1720, played out in colonial Central America.<sup>44</sup> In one sense, the middle colonial period solidified practices begun in the conquest period, namely neglect from the Spanish Crown and a weak economy based on ranching with minimal exports. Coupled with numerous invasions from pirates and other enemies of the Spanish Crown throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the devastation brought upon the indigenous populations from war and disease, and overall disinterest from Spanish officials created an economy that was inclined to focus on immediate needs. It was far easier and more profitable to let cattle graze the land than to grow the foodstuffs needed to support an export market of indigo, cacao, and silver. As MacLeod, Floyd, and Wortman have demonstrated, it took until the eighteenth century when indigenous populations rebounded and Bourbon policy makers decided to subsidize the sale of mercury to Honduran silver miners that the export economy (namely Honduran silver and Salvadoran indigo) helped to lift the other economies of Central America.<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps most importantly, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also formalized how Spain governed its colonies. The purchase of government office and a limited

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<sup>43</sup> Most point to the 1542 New Laws as the main force in slowing the traffic of slaves, although it was not until the death of Bishop Valdivieso in 1550 at the hands of the Contreras brothers signal the end of this phase of Nicaraguan history.

<sup>44</sup> MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*.

<sup>45</sup> MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*; Floyd, Troy S., “Guatemalan Merchants, the Government, and the Provincianos, 1750-1800,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 41, No. 1, 1961, pp. 92-93; Wortman, *Government and Society in Central America*.

amount of oversight into the economic affairs of colonial officials allowed for individuals to use the power of their office for economic gain. Despite numerous attempts to curtail the exploitative powers of royal officials, corrupt practices remained a major motivation throughout the colonial period. Whether it be on royal, Church, or personal business, individuals in positions of political or social authority used their power to extract concessions for themselves. It would be this entrenched force that Bourbon officials in the age of Charles III faced.<sup>46</sup>

The beginning of the eighteenth century, however, brought with it a number of changes that challenged traditional patterns in Central America. Aside from the ascension of the House of Bourbon to the Spanish throne, the Audiencia of Guatemala also experienced a number of internal shifts by the eighteenth century. The population of all categories of people (Spanish, Indian, Mulatto, and Mestizo) grew extensively (see Figure 1—at the end of the chapter). Robert Patch has argued that in addition to the stimulus provided by silver and indigo exports, an increase in total numbers of tributaries (that is, Indians who paid tribute to Spanish officials) and new Spanish policies designed to augment Indian participation in the regional economy fueled a resurgent Central American economy.<sup>47</sup> Additional external forces, such as spending by military and Church officials, new Spanish policies, and the threat of invasion from other imperial rivals contributed to the eighteenth century being a distinct period of time during the colonial period.

### **Scope and Organization**

This dissertation explores the intersections of empire-wide political and economic

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<sup>46</sup> MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*, remains the best source for this period of history.

<sup>47</sup> Patch, *Indians and the Political Economy*.

reforms of the eighteenth century with local realities in one of the most peripheral areas of Spain's empire. I analyze how policies implemented during the Bourbon era offered unequal prospects to social groups (e.g., Indians, merchants, soldiers, and farmers), state and non-state institutions (e.g., the Church, town councils, merchant guilds, and regional governments), and individuals to reconfigure traditional local power arrangements.<sup>48</sup> This process, not surprisingly, produced conflicts between individuals, communities, and institutions as they attempted to expand and defend their traditional roles in society. These disputes, often captured in voluminous court proceedings, written complaints, and official reports demonstrate how royal officials and local actors negotiated—and fought—for economic, social, and political power and authority during a period of great change.

Rather than analyze the Bourbon Reforms chronologically or in their totality, I approach the topic through four subject areas which, in turn, are supported by case studies and examples that capture distinct themes. Chapter One examines the changing relationship between the Catholic Church and the Crown through an analysis of a series of disputes that broke out in the 1760s and 1770s between the bishop of León and the governor of Nicaragua. These disputes highlight an evolution of thought occurring in Bourbon Spain: that royal officials should take a greater role in shaping public morality. Chapter Two uses reports on contraband and illegal trade to evaluate how new economic policies introduced by Bourbon administrators—namely the introduction of royal monopolies and new trading rules—provoked a myriad of responses throughout southern

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<sup>48</sup>A note on terms. Throughout this dissertation, I employ a variety of terms to describe various groups of people. Frequently, I rely on eighteenth century terms employed by the colonial Spanish administrators. Where possible, I have used the terms indigenous peoples and indigenous communities

Central America. Chapters Three and Four analyze the experiences of indigenous peoples in two very different areas of Central America. In the third chapter, I examine native people living in western Nicaragua, where Spanish rule was its strongest and indigenous communities struggled to defend themselves from increasingly onerous demands for labor and tribute set by Bourbon officials. In the fourth chapter, the view is shifted to eastern and central Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Honduras, where Spain's presence was tenuous or non-existent. There, local indigenous groups capitalized on Spanish fears of a British presence in eastern Central America to extract major concessions and preserve their autonomy while individuals sold their services to the competing empires. Collectively, these four chapters outline how Bourbon Spain approached colonial governance in a peripheral area and provide specific examples of how royal officials, local communities, and institutions worked with and worked against imperial goals.

A thematic approach to this period allows an analysis of historic trends that often took decades to emerge. The reforms introduced by Spanish officials often came in a confusing, piecemeal fashion over the course of a century. Moreover, while many of these reforms were technically in force for decades, it often took dramatic events or the appointment of new personnel to spur implementation of the new policies. The vague and sometimes contradictory decrees that came out of Spain also hinder a narrow chronological approach to the Bourbon period. Orders coming from Spain or the viceregal capital in Mexico usually left it to the discretion—and sometimes imagination—of local officials on how to implement the new policies. Furthermore, groups poised to lose out with the implementation of the reforms spent many years trying to frustrate the implementation of the reforms through legal challenges (which could take

decades) or through other, less-than-legal, efforts. What this means is that in order to study and analyze the changes that took place over time—the fundamental role of a historian—in colonial Central America, it became necessary to disentangle this complex period and organize it in a thematic and approachable way.

The fractured nature of the documentary evidence for Central America, especially for documents pertaining to colonial Nicaragua, has also shaped the course and conduct of this dissertation and influenced the choice of thematic topics. Spanish colonial administrators were, by and large, excellent bureaucrats. Reports, orders, and judgments flowed from the highest levels within the Spanish Empire to colonial officials in far off, exotic, lands. These remote officials also produced reports, orders, and judgments and usually conveyed important information (often in triplicate) to their immediate superiors and usually to regional officials at the Audiencia or viceregal level. Much of the information used in this dissertation comes from archives located at the regional and imperial levels. The Archivo General de Centro América (AGCA) in Guatemala City inherited most of the colonial-era documents in Guatemala. As the capital of the Audiencia, it received the lion's share of reports from southern Central America. The Archivo General de Indias (AGI) in Seville, Spain also houses an impressive number of documents pertaining to Central America. The AGI includes copies of documents from Guatemala (which sometimes cannot be found in the AGCA) and—importantly—documents from other Spanish jurisdictions, such as documents that originated within the viceroyalties in Mexico, Cuba, or Santa Fé (northern South America). These archives allow a broad and extensive look at how the Spanish colonial bureaucracy operated and occasionally offers a detailed picture of the peripheral areas within the Audiencia of

Guatemala when local authorities defer to or refer high-level officials located in regional or imperial centers.

While the documents from the AGI and AGCA excel at conveying how Nicaragua and southern Central America fit into the larger Spanish Empire, they often lack details of how Spanish officials operated at the lowest levels. It was only when a Spanish official in southern Central America had a complaint registered against him, filed a requested report, rendered a judgment that is appealed to higher authorities, or submitted an especially crucial piece of information that officials in Guatemala, Mexico, or Spain received any word of what Spanish officials were doing in Nicaragua, Honduras, or Costa Rica. Lower-level reports and correspondence that was not copied and forwarded to higher ups usually remained in local archives. Unfortunately for the historian of colonial Nicaragua (and to a lesser extent Costa Rica and Honduras), these documents are either inaccessible or have been destroyed. The American filibuster William Walker destroyed all of Granada's (colonial Nicaragua's second largest town) municipal archives in the mid-nineteenth century and earthquakes destroyed Nicaragua's national library, where many of the colonial documents had been transferred to, not just once, but twice. The first earthquake struck in 1931 and the other in 1972. Nicaragua's national library now houses photocopies of colonial documents collected from Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Spain. The largest collection of extant colonial documentation in Nicaragua is housed at the Archivo Diocesano de León. Although it is a Church archive, the collection houses both ecclesiastical and municipal records going back to at least the mid-seventeenth century. Regrettably, much of the unorganized collection is inaccessible because the underfunded archive is located in an ecclesiastical

building that was heavily damaged by Hurricane Mitch in 1998. As such, only a small portion of the archive's documents are open to researchers. The other main repository of colonial era documents in Nicaragua is housed at the University of Nicaragua-León. Comprised of fourteen archival boxes, the university's collection is small, but well organized, and contains court records from civil and criminal cases. These local archives offer exciting glimpses of the regular, day-to-day operation of colonial rule.

Beyond the fractured nature of the existing documentation, there is also the very real issue that the historical record of the eighteenth century represents an incomplete and ultimately narrow view of life for whole populations within Central America. There are few opportunities to read directly about the motivations and desires of Africans, Indians, women, mestizos, poor Spaniards, children, and other marginalized populations. On the surface, the records produced by the literate sectors of society remained focused on colonial administration, religious affairs, military preparedness (or lack thereof), and commerce. Nonetheless, the records that remain available to the modern researcher do offer glimpses—usually at oblique angles—into areas of life outside of these narrow concerns.

This dissertation attempts to show how the seemingly dry political and economic changes introduced into Central America had profound influence over how people lived their lives. The often contradictory and vague reforms introduced in the eighteenth century tried to expand the scope and power of royal interests over those of local power brokers. Through legal battles over the regulation of public behavior between the Church and royal officials, petitions from towns to grow tightly-regulated tobacco, preparations

for war against British-held territory along the Mosquito Coast, and the difficulties of controlling local indigenous allies, I demonstrate how local actors attempted to renegotiate existing social, political, and economic relationships in a changing legal and regulatory climate. This process parallels actions taken throughout the Atlantic World as imperial subjects negotiated and sometimes challenged European rule. This process, however, produced conflicts between individuals, communities, and institutions as they attempted to expand and defend their traditional roles in society. I argue that it is through these conflicts and negotiations that new patterns of social relations took shape.

**Figure 1**

Population of the Kingdom of Guatemala, ca. 1775-1800

Chiapas	69,253
Guatemala	390,450
San Salvador	117,436

Honduras:

Comayagua	56,677
Tegucigalpa	31,455
Total:	88,132

Nicaragua

León	69,399
Matagalpa	19,955
Nicoya	2,983
Realejo	6,209
Subtiava	8,850
Total:	107,396

Costa Rica	24,536
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Total of Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica: 220,064

Entire Audiencia of Guatemala: 797,203

Adapted from:: Dym, *From Sovereign Villages*, p.270

Chapter One: Fiestas, Fandangos, and Shameful Acts:  
Redefining Church and State Authority in Late Colonial Nicaragua

On February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1771 the Bishop of Nicaragua and Costa Rica, Juan Carlos Vélchez y Cabrera, sent a message to all of the priests stationed along the *camino real* (royal road) between the main cities of León and Granada.<sup>49</sup> In his letter, the bishop explicitly forbade anyone to allow the governor of the province, Domingo Cabello y Robles, into their churches, let alone offer the governor the sacraments of confession or communion. The bishop further informed the priests that he had excommunicated Governor Cabello from the Church and that any member of the clergy found assisting him would be subject to the same punishment.<sup>50</sup> The governor, who was en route to the eastern frontier to inspect forts along the San Juan River and assess the possibility of an attack from the British and their Indian allies, called the bishop's orders a 'grave scandal' and a vilified attack on his person.<sup>51</sup>

While news of the governor's excommunication may have elicited excitement amongst the population, it should not have been surprising to anyone in the province, nor, for that matter, in the Audiencia of Guatemala. Indeed, since Governor Cabello's arrival in Nicaragua in December of 1764, the bishop and the governor had clashed several times over matters both seemingly trivial and central to the administration of the province.

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<sup>49</sup> I have modernized the Spanish names of people and places in the main body of text. I have retained the original spelling in the footnotes.

<sup>50</sup> Juan Carlos Vélchez y Cabrera, "Carta de Don Carlos Vélchez y Cabrera a las curas de Nagarste, Managua, Nindirí, Masaya, Granada y buelva a la ciudad," AD, Juzgado Eclesiástico, 1767-1771.

<sup>51</sup> "Ynstruccion para el govierno que debe observar Dn Domingo Cavello Governador de la Prova de León, Sobre la excomunion que le impuso el Ytl.mo Sr. Obispo de esta Provincia" Archivo General de Centro America [hereafter AGCA], A1.11.39 (5) Exp. 577, Leg. 71.

Disputes over dancing, treatment of Indians, propriety, collection of taxes and tribute, trade, and the relationship between the Church and the royal government dominated events in the Central American province during the twelve years Cabello was governor and continued to flare up after he departed to govern the Spanish colony in Texas. Although the immediate cause of Cabello's excommunication remains unclear, the bishop's act punctuated what was a highly dysfunctional relationship between the two top officials in Nicaragua.

Disagreements and public quarrels between royal officials and the Church in the late eighteenth century offer a glimpse into the shifting nature of governance at the end of the colonial period. While local in nature and often devolving into tit-for-tat conflicts of personal animosity, the origins of these disputes can be traced back to reforms introduced by the Spanish monarchy on an imperial level in the mid-eighteenth century. Chief among the monarchy's many goals was to increase the power of royal officials at the expense of the Church. However, the decades-long process to modernize, standardize, and centralize new powers of state came in piece-meal fashion that created as much confusion as it did clarity in Spain's imperial system. Indeed, while officials in Spain dreamed up the major goals and drafted royal orders, they did little to spell out exactly how to implement these goals, leaving agents of the Crown in the colonies few instructions or funds to bring about the desired changes.

This chapter examines the complex relationship between members of the Catholic Church and royal officials towards the end of the colonial period. I contend that questions over the regulation of proper behavior, Spanish interactions with Indians, and public morality became battlegrounds where civil and religious authorities challenged

each other for power from the 1750s to the 1790s. At their core, these disputes centered on attempts to *redefine* commonly accepted legal practices and local traditions. Decrees and laws drafted by the king and royal council in Spain set in motion a variety of local responses in the colonies. Specifically, royal officials sought to reduce the role of the clergy in day-to-day life by confining them to policing matters of doctrine and faith.<sup>52</sup> For example, the king issued new orders to expand the reach of royal jurisdiction to include 'public sins' and local officials tried to reduce the influence of the clergy amongst indigenous communities by limiting their participation in community elections and management of the *cajas de comunidad* [community coffers].<sup>53</sup> The Crown also moved to take over aspects of public welfare—a traditional area of concern of the Church—by creating state-run hospitals and orphanages.<sup>54</sup> Reformers also sought to weaken the regular orders, such as the Jesuits and Dominicans, by quickening the pace of secularization of their missions and churches (or by outright banning the order) and at the same time they tried to limit the ability of the secular clergy to intervene in affairs of state.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the measures that the Crown employed, Church officials defended their traditional roles with varying degrees of success. Some, such as Bishop Vilchez, took advantage of confusing, ambiguous, and contradictory decrees to try to *increase* the legal authority of religious leaders. Thus, although the movement to restrict the power of the Church gained ground in the eighteenth century amongst royal officials in Spain and their

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<sup>52</sup> Nancy Farriss, *Crown and Clergy in Colonial Mexico, 1759-1821: The Crisis of Ecclesiastical Privilege* (London: Athlone, 1968).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-26.

<sup>54</sup> Cynthia Milton, *Many Meanings of Poverty* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> William Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred, Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

counterparts in the colonies, the reforms faced stiff resistance from clergy and their allies since both sides could claim that by law and tradition they had a legitimate right to exercise authority.

The conflict between Church and state reached its dramatic climax in Nicaragua during the tenures of Governor Domingo Cabello y Robles (1764-1776) and Bishop Juan Carlos Vílchez y Cabrera (1763-1774), though events before and after the departure of Cabello demonstrate that changing local and imperial circumstances could alter how royal and Church officials exercised their authority. Participants in these disputes recognized how imperial reforms of the eighteenth century could alter the existing local political power structures and social fabric of colonial society. New laws and new interpretations of laws created opportunities for seemingly benign disagreements to explode into hotly contested controversies. Local and personal rivalries added to the intensity of the conflicts. While the competition for authority between Church and secular authorities has historical roots in medieval Spain and the early colonial period, this chapter examines how civil authorities at the end of the colonial period tried to restrict the traditional role of the Church as arbiter of daily life, and how Church leaders responded.<sup>56</sup>

Prior to the mid-eighteenth century, ecclesiastics had a wide range of official and unofficial duties in Spain's American colonies. They acted as tax collectors, protectors of Indian autonomy, mediators of local and domestic conflicts, and enforcers of public

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<sup>56</sup> Indeed, conflicts between civil and religious authorities began very early in Nicaragua's history. In 1549, Bishop Antonio de Valdevieso was murdered by the two sons of Nicaragua's governor, Rodrigo Contreras. An excellent starting point on the evolution of how secular power in Spain evolved in concert and conflict with the Catholic Church is Colin M. MacLachlan, *Spain's Empire in the New World: The Role of Ideas in Institutional and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

morality. Changes introduced in the eighteenth century reduced or took away many of these traditional responsibilities and put them in the hands of secular authorities. As I demonstrate in this chapter, the ill-defined and changing jurisdictional boundaries between Church and state brought on by imperial reforms in the mid-eighteenth century caused both legal and bureaucratic confusion in colonial Nicaragua over who had the authority to regulate and govern fundamental aspects of society. These disputes reverberated throughout Nicaragua's small and relatively isolated communities and revealed larger patterns of social unrest, most notably the tension between local elites (which backed Nicaraguan-born Vilchez) and regional and military elites (who supported Cabello and had fewer ties to Nicaragua).

### **Historical Context**

The conflict that emerged during the eighteenth century between Church and colonial authorities arose out of efforts by the Crown to restrict the Church's traditional role in society. From its beginnings in the early sixteenth century, the ruling dynasty in Spain, the Habsburgs, relied on the Church to help it maintain and extend Spanish dominion over its newly conquered territories in the Americas. Although certainly based on strong religious convictions, the decision to employ the Church in a complementary fashion to royal authority also made political sense and expedited the colonization process.<sup>57</sup> The clergy served as agents to check excessive independence and helped to report abuses by the early colonists and secular officials. Additionally, the clergy

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<sup>57</sup> John Schwaller, *The History of the Catholic Church in Latin America: From Conquest to Revolution to Beyond* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

brought new populations under nominal Spanish control, often without bloodshed.<sup>58</sup> Finally, by converting people to Christianity and administering to their spiritual well-being, the Church helped to unify the diverse and scattered Spanish, Indian, and slave populations by providing them with a common religion, language, and clearly defined social hierarchy.

This symbiotic relationship between the Habsburg Crown and the Roman Catholic Church developed into a fundamental aspect of Spanish colonial rule and was codified in the *Patronato Real de las Indias* (Royal Patronage of the Indies).<sup>59</sup> Agreed to by the Crown and the papacy in Rome, the Patronato gave the monarchy direct control over the Church in Spain and its colonies except in doctrinal matters. The king or queen appointed clergymen to their posts in Spain's territories and the Council of the Indies received all ecclesiastical reports.<sup>60</sup> In return for these benefits, the Crown agreed to support and finance the Church's activities as well as continue the special system of privileges granted to ecclesiastical authorities known as *fueros*. Over time and for a variety of reasons (mainly economic), many functions of government, such as collecting taxes and arbitrating civil and criminal cases fell to Church officials.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, these duties were reflected in a parish priest's standard title of 'parish priest of Your Majesty, vicar in-possession and ecclesiastical judge' (*cura por su Magestad vicario in capite y juez eclesiástico*).<sup>62</sup> This secular role given to the Church, combined with its spiritual authority over Spaniards, mestizos, mulattos, and Indians, helped Spain colonize and

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<sup>58</sup> Farriss, *Crown and Clergy in Colonial Mexico*, pp. 3-6.

<sup>59</sup> The Patronato Real was first signed in 1508 between Pope Julius II and Philip II. See, W. Eugene Shiels, S.J., *King and Church: The Rise and Fall of the Patronato Real* (Baltimore: Loyola University Press, 1961

<sup>60</sup> Wortman, *Government and Society in Central America*, p. 41

<sup>61</sup> This included both official and non-official duties. Ibid. pp. 61-63.

<sup>62</sup> Cited in Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred*, p. 158, translation mine.

control most of the Americas that made the most out of the treasury. Nevertheless, this arrangement also undercut the ability of the Crown to effectively manage the Church as the ecclesiastical authorities amassed wealth, special privileges, and enjoyed considerable loyalty from the population.<sup>63</sup>

### **The Bourbon Challenge to Church Authority**

The system set up under the Patronato Real entrenched itself in Spanish America and helped the Habsburg Crown to manage its empire. Yet the decentralized nature of Habsburg rule represented a serious obstacle for the Bourbons who, after 1700, gained control of the Spanish monarchy. The new rulers sought to put an end to Habsburg institutions and the philosophy of decentralized power. In its place, the Bourbons (especially after 1759, when Charles III came to power) wanted to revamp colonial society in order to make it more efficient, logical, and productive for the Spanish Crown.<sup>64</sup> A part of that undertaking rested on the imposition of royal authority over the Church's traditional role in society.

The Bourbon rulers and their bureaucrats instituted a series of reforms over the course of the eighteenth century designed to erode the power of the ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>65</sup> Tentative moves came in the first half of the century with a series of decrees and challenges to ecclesiastical prerogatives and culminated during the reign of

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<sup>63</sup> Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred*, pp. 3-10.

<sup>64</sup> This new philosophy was heavily influenced by the Enlightenment and the adaptation of these types of governing strategies in other European countries. The year 1759 is important because that is when the ambitious Charles III ascended the throne.

<sup>65</sup> Two classics that examine this period of ecclesiastical change in detail are: Magnus Mörner, "The Expulsion of the Jesuits from Spain and Spanish America in 1767 in Light of Eighteenth-Century Regalism" *The Americas*, 23: (1966): pp.156-164; and D.A. Brading, *Church and State in Bourbon Mexico: The diocese of Michoacán 1749-1810* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Charles III (1759-1788). Later Bourbon monarchs instituted or otherwise refined their opposition to the Church's power.<sup>66</sup> Not only were these reforms based on Enlightenment ideas popular in other European courts at the time, but they also developed from within the Spanish intellectual community.<sup>67</sup> Although these reforms were not intended to eliminate the Catholic Church from Spanish possessions, Bourbon administrators felt they had to de-emphasize the Church's role in economic, political, and social matters if centralized rule and increased economic productivity were to take place.<sup>68</sup>

The reformers attacked the Church's wealth, its special legal rights and jurisdictional authority, and its social prestige at local and regional levels with a series of written commentaries and royal decrees. For example, Bourbon reformers such as Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes argued that the Church's wealth was not put to good use.<sup>69</sup> He reasoned that the Church's wealth ran counter to the interests of the state and the people because it was economically unproductive and the state extracted no taxes from it. Determined to reduce the economic significance of the Church, the Council of Indies (the main royal body administering Spain's empire) issued several royal cédulas (orders) in the early eighteenth century that prohibited the collection of tribute by ecclesiastics and ordered civil authorities to administer community funds (*cajas de comunidad*).<sup>70</sup> Reformers also targeted regular religious orders, which were seen as more loyal to the Pope than to the Spanish Bourbons, by limiting the number of new members in the orders, restricting membership to convents, and reducing the number of cofradías

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<sup>66</sup> Mark A. Burkholder and David S. Chandler, *From Impotence to Authority—The Spanish Crown and the American Audiencias, 1687-1808* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1977).

<sup>67</sup> John Lynch, *Bourbon Spain* (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 1989).

<sup>68</sup> Burkholder and Chandler, *From Impotence to Authority*, pp. 24-27.

<sup>69</sup> Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes, *Tratado de la regalia de amortización* (Madrid, no publisher, 1765).

<sup>70</sup> Wortman, *Government and Society*, pp. 136-138.

(religious confraternities).<sup>71</sup> The attacks on the Church's independence and authority partially succeeded in transferring some power and authority to civil officials and culminated in 1767 when Charles III expelled the Jesuit order from Spain and its possessions.<sup>72</sup> Officials in Spain were not the only ones attempting to restrict the power of the Church. Royal officials in the colonies used novel strategies to centralize their own power at the expense of the Church. For example, after earthquakes destroyed much of Santiago de Guatemala in 1773, the captain general of the Audiencia made plans to relocate the capital city to a nearby valley. Property owners in Santiago de Guatemala, led by the biggest property holder—the Church—fiercely protested this plan, as it would deprive them of land, prestige, and income.<sup>73</sup> The protests succeeded in stalling the move for a few years, but ultimately the Captain General had his way.

Although reforms targeted different aspects of the Church's power, one of the main sources of the clergy's institutional and social power, and consequently the one of main targets of Charles III's reforms, was the Church's extensive judicial jurisdiction—both official and unofficial. The absence of royal authority in the early and middle colonial period allowed the Church to develop a huge system of parallel courts, jurisdictions, and established traditions that, over time and out of sheer necessity, expanded the Church's authority to other areas. In addition to resolving spiritual matters

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<sup>71</sup> Farriss, *Crown and Clergy*, pp. 10-12; Wortman, *Government and Society*, pp. 62-64.

<sup>72</sup> In most cases the Crown tried to replace the Jesuit missionaries with secular clergy, since the Crown directly controlled the appointment of them through the Patronato Real. In practice, however, the Crown had to rely on other regular orders, such as the Franciscans, to maintain the missions founded by the Jesuits. Perhaps the most well-known example of this is the Franciscan takeover of the Jesuit missions in the Pimeria Alta in the north-west of New Spain. Mörner, "The Expulsion of the Jesuits..."; additionally, other reforms limited the movement of clergy in Spanish America. See, Farriss, *Crown and Clergy*, p. 61.

<sup>73</sup> Christophe Belaubre, "In the Shadow of the Great: Church Financiers' Everyday Resistance to the Bourbon Reforms, Guatemala City, 1773-1821" in Jordana Dym and Christophe Belaubre, eds., *Politics, Economy and Society in Bourbon Central America, 1759-1821*, (Boulder, CO, 2007), 47-48.

of conscience, the Church courts had exclusive jurisdiction over a number of offenses, including bigamy and “nefarious crimes” (*crímenes nefandos*, usually falling under the category of sodomy) and also had the right to try anyone who sought asylum on Church property.<sup>74</sup> Church courts also had jurisdiction over many types of civil suits (including divorce proceedings), and almost all types of probate (a process that made legal a situation, such as a contract or officially recognizing an illegitimate child), and litigation involving Church property.<sup>75</sup> In addition, William Taylor, the leading scholar on the Church in Bourbon Mexico, found that priests often acted as informal judges in local cases of assault and battery and served to adjudicate matters of small importance that technically belonged in civil or royal criminal courts.<sup>76</sup> Finally, priests and missionaries frequently found themselves intervening in disputes involving Indians.

For absolutist monarchies, such as the Bourbon monarchy, the Church’s legal power—which was independent of the king—flew in the face of the concept of regalism, which stated that all power and authority came directly from the king.<sup>77</sup> While the Habsburg kings had allowed this type of system to develop, the Bourbon kings actively set about to destroy it. The Marqués de Ensenada and Campomanes, both influential from the 1740s through the 1780s, were two of the principal authors of this attack. They argued the Church’s only inherent right was to regulate the purely spiritual questions of

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<sup>74</sup> For example, in 1739 the local clergy notified the inquisition about Justo Carrillo, a freed black from the town of Rivas, who was suspected of bigamy. See “Proceso de fe de Justo Carrillo” AGI, Inquisicion, 1730, exp. 14; Zeb Tortorici has explored how sodomy and acts labeled as “unnatural” have influenced the colonial Church and modern scholars. Zeb Tortorici, “Against Nature: Sodomy and Homosexuality in Colonial Latin America” *History Compass* 10:2 (2012) 161-178.

<sup>75</sup> Farriss, *Crown and Clergy*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>76</sup> Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred*, p. 159. He also found that priests’ abilities to write earned him a prominent role in informal record keeping. Pp. 166-167.

<sup>77</sup> Iris H. W. Engstrand, “The Enlightenment in Spain: Influences upon New World Policy” *The Americas*, 41:4 (1985), pp. 436-444.

dogma, liturgy and the sacraments, and that its original function of administering spiritual penance for sins had developed illegally into a massive judicial system rivaling the state.<sup>78</sup> Reformers instead envisioned priests as primarily educators of religion, language, and modernity instead of judges in local conflicts.<sup>79</sup> Following this line of reasoning, the Crown issued a series of decrees reducing ecclesiastical jurisdiction by using regalist theories on the purely spiritual nature of the Church's authority.<sup>80</sup> These measures were implemented piece-meal over an extended period of time, yet consistently shrank the Church's legal responsibilities. For example, after 1746, divorce proceedings continued to be brought before Church authorities, but new reforms put civil authorities in charge of splitting up the couple's assets and dowry.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, in the 1750s and 1760s, governors were given the right to intervene in conflicts among Church officials and could, although it rarely occurred, depose uncooperative prelates and parish officials of their duties.<sup>82</sup> Additionally, the Crown encouraged closer scrutiny of the role clerics played in society by ordering all viceroys and governors to conduct investigations 'with the greatest secrecy and care' into the conduct and character of the ecclesiastics in their areas and to send the information to the Secretary of the *Despacho de Indias* (a ministry in the Council of Indies) for incorporation into permanent files on the colonial clergy.<sup>83</sup>

While there is little doubt that the Church's role in some areas decreased in the

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<sup>78</sup> Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred*, p. 13.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p. 158.

<sup>80</sup> Farriss, *Crown and Clergy*, p. 94

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, pp. 22-25.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. Farriss cites two cases from the Yucatán involving the removal of parish priests, pp. 24-26. She additionally states that the Church was considered incapable of imposing punishments commensurate with 'public sins', crimes formerly prosecuted by the diocesan courts. These were compiled in *Novísima Recopilación de las leyes de España*, published in the 1790s, but ordered in a series of cédulas in 1770s.

<sup>83</sup> Farriss, *Crown and Clergy*, p. 29.

eighteenth century because of Bourbon policies, it still held broad religious, financial, and legal authority over matters outside the church doors. Moreover, as reforms began to be dispatched from Spain, the colonial Church fought, ignored, and contested many of the provisions in order to maintain its privileged place in society. Some, like Bishop Vílchez, actively battled against the implementation of specific reforms, such as the ability to regulate public and private gatherings. Other religious officials adopted more passive measures to ensure that the Church remained important. Christophe Belaubre argues that Church administrators in Guatemala deftly navigated eighteenth century reforms by making economic alliances with powerful merchants to protect the Church's economic standing.<sup>84</sup>

Furthermore, religious processions and feast days still punctuated the social calendar of daily life and reminded residents of their commitments to God and their community. The substantial time, effort, and money devoted to the preparation for holy days reinforced the notion of the parish priest as a community leader. Despite attempts in the eighteenth century by royal officials to promote secular holidays, such as coronation of new kings, the births of princes and princesses, and Spanish military victories, religious festivities retained their importance.<sup>85</sup> Celebrations on holy days allowed the Church to spill out onto the streets and demonstrated the close connection between the leadership of the Church and the public.

The extensive lands and herds owned by the religious community (through religious orders, monasteries, and *cofradías*) continued to provide the Church with a significant income and acted as a source of credit and economic development for the

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<sup>84</sup> Belaubre, "In the Shadow of the Great" in Dym and Belaubre, *Politics, Economy and Society*.

<sup>85</sup> Martin, *Governance and Society*, pp.103-104, 113, 119.

region. For example, when Bishop Vélchez learned that a *cofradía* in the Nicoya Peninsula had over a thousand head of cattle but lacked the resources to bring the herd to the annual trade fair in San Salvador, he offered to loan the religious brotherhood 1000 pesos at 5% interest, thus allowing the organization to hire enough laborers and purchase the horses needed to escort the herd to the fair.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, priests and missionaries, with their language skills, continued to serve as go-betweens for Indian communities and the Spanish world. The prominent place within the social hierarchy of communities ensured that Church officials continued to play leading roles in society.

That ecclesiastical authorities held on to many of their traditional roles and continued to exercise influence beyond the pulpit in spite of decades of reforms reveals the limits of royal power. But how did the clergy and its supporters delay, frustrate, and, in some cases, reverse reformist measures promulgated by the Crown? The clergy's best defense against changes in policies depended on mounting legal challenges. This process involved lengthy proceedings that could take up to a decade to decide. In their cases against proposed reforms the clergy claimed tradition, conflicting royal decrees and Audiencia decisions, and even the Council of Trent required religious authorities to police and discipline their communities on matters that Church officials found important. The legal challenges to religious reforms helped to block or diminish some of the harshest challenges to the Church's role in Spanish America.

Royal officials, on the other hand, cited different *cédulas* and Audiencia rulings as counterpoints to ecclesiastical recalcitrance.<sup>87</sup> For example, ecclesiastics argued that

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<sup>86</sup> Juan Carlos Vélchez y Cabrera “Carta del Obispo Juan Carlos Vélchez y Cabrera a cura de Nicoya Maximiliano Antonio de Alvarado, 23 de agosto de 1768” AD, Juzgado Eclesiastico #3, 1756-1771; Folder 9

<sup>87</sup> ‘Testimonio de los exhortos’ AGCA, A1.11.39 (5) exp. 576, leg. 71.

matters of conscience and faith (which Bourbons openly declared operated under religious jurisdiction) extended to ‘public sins’, such as gambling, drinking, and sexual misconduct.<sup>88</sup> Royal officials, however, fervently believed that ecclesiastical meddling in these affairs constituted as an overreach of power. Moreover, Church leaders frequently ignored pleas from royal officials (and new laws) not to interfere in local political squabbles, especially in indigenous communities. The frequent clashes between representatives of the Church and Crown—and the long delays in any official ruling—led to confusion about which institutions had the authority to regulate numerous aspects of daily life and set the stage for the protracted battles between the bishop and the governor.

### **Church and State Relations**

As we have seen, civil and religious authorities in Nicaragua were at odds with one another over the regulation of—among other things—public morality, treatment of Indians, and the collection of taxes and tribute. However, at their core, the disputes were primarily about whether the Church or the secular state had the (or in some cases had *more*) authority to regulate and administer particular aspects of daily life. There have been several historians who have looked at these aspects in works on late colonial Spanish America. Indeed, these studies also emphasize the changing relationship between the colonial Church and the state.

The shift between Hapsburg rule and Bourbon rule in the eighteenth century provides historians with a unique opportunity to see how traditions and precedent adapted to new ideas. The Bourbons, however, were severely limited in how they could implement these reforms as several sectors of colonial society resisted, diminished, or

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<sup>88</sup> Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred*, pp. 160-161.

thwarted many of these reforms. Vested interests, localism, and old traditions inherited from the Hapsburg state remained in place in throughout Spanish America.<sup>89</sup> As such, the Bourbons had, as Miles Wortman states, to “build their structure [the state] slowly and consciously...with new laws and ideas.”<sup>90</sup> This process began in 1714 and reached its pinnacle during the first decade of the reign of Charles III.<sup>91</sup> Many of the new laws and ideas that the Bourbons attempted to implement in colonial Spanish America focused on reducing the role of the Catholic Church. During the Bourbon and Hapsburg eras, the interests of the Church and the Spanish state often went hand-in-hand.

Nevertheless, this relationship did not always function in harmony. Historian William Taylor recognized the nature of the system when he wrote, “Church and state were combined throughout the colonial period and often mutually reinforcing, but they were not coextensive.”<sup>92</sup> Shifts in Spanish policy, especially concerning the treatment of indigenous groups, monetary policy, and ecclesiastical jurisdiction led to conflict between two powerful sectors of society that could call upon various supporters within the community for aid.

Recently, scholars have examined the role that the Church and state played in constructing, policing, and reinforcing popular notions of morality. Juan Pedro Viqueira Albán, for example, contends that in late colonial Mexico, civil and religious authorities worked together to end lewd and improper behavior by actively monitoring, regulating,

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<sup>89</sup> Burkholder and Chandler, *From Impotence to Authority*.

<sup>90</sup> Miles Wortman, *Government and Society*, p 132.

<sup>91</sup> While the Bourbons gained control of the Spanish throne in 1700, effective control did not come into place until The Treaty of Utrecht (1714), which formalized the Bourbon claim to the throne and ended the War of the Spanish Succession (1700-1714).

<sup>92</sup> William B. Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred*, p.6.

or repressing certain types of public celebrations, such as theater, street performances, dances, and ball games. He argues that although religious and secular authorities could find these events immoral for different reasons, they still acted together to end or reform practices that they both found troubling.<sup>93</sup> For example, Bourbon officials in Mexico City tried to convert popular theater into a tool to promote new, enlightened concepts of economics, health, and proper behavior. According to Viqueira Albán, Church officials assisted this effort because they considered popular theater lewd and immoral.<sup>94</sup>

Pamela Voekel and Patricia Seed also examine the role of religion at the end of the eighteenth century. They both note that this period saw a shift away from large Baroque celebrations and folk Catholicism to new rituals and practices that emphasized modernity, such as a personal connection to God and new burial patterns. These enlightened ideas especially took hold amongst the elite of society.<sup>95</sup> Eugenia Rodríguez-Sáenz, following Asunción Lavrín's earlier work, also sees cooperation between the Church and the state in promoting and standardizing behaviors. She argues that in Costa Rica, Church and royal officials worked in conjunction to regulate sexual behavior and marriages, especially among the elite. New laws and regulations were put into place by Church and royal officials to prevent marriages that were “unequal in quality and class”.<sup>96</sup> Others sought to clamp down on illicit sexual relationships and illegitimate births. These

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<sup>93</sup> Juan Pedro Viqueira Albán, *Propriety and Permissiveness in Bourbon Mexico* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* Chapter 2, pp. 34-55.

<sup>95</sup> Pamela Voekel, *Alone Before God: The Religious Origins of Modernity in Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) and Patricia Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts over Marriage Choice, 1574-1821* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988)

<sup>96</sup> Eugenia Rodríguez-Sáenz, ““Relaciones Ilícitas y Matrimonios Desiguales” : Bourbon reforms and the regulation of sexual mores in eighteenth-century Costa Rica” in Dym and Belaubre, eds., *Politics, Economy, and Society*, pg. 204

efforts attempted to strengthen the colonial order by making unions between different races and classes more difficult. In contrast, William Taylor, found that the Bourbon reformers and the Church did not always work together in promoting new ideas. He contends that reforms targeting the clergy jeopardized the integrity and authority of parish priests in the eyes of their parishioners. Bourbon reformers, Taylor argues, attempted to wrestle control away from the Church by actively diminishing the Church's role within the community.<sup>97</sup>

Whether religious or secular, Spanish officials went to great lengths to eliminate behavior deemed deviant, problematic, or subversive. Scholarship on the Inquisition, especially on the era from the Conquest to about 1700, has repeatedly explored how many Spanish officials monitored and policed activities. Javier Villa-Flores, for example, demonstrates that religious and civil authorities worked closely together in combating 'dangerous speech' (blasphemy). Indeed, blasphemy and other wicked acts ranked as one of the top priorities of these officials because they feared the repercussions of a vengeful God.<sup>98</sup> However, by the eighteenth century, cooperation between civil and religious authorities on the prosecution of acts that were scandalous began to wane. Pamela Voekel, along with Taylor, offers an analysis that contends that officials more often concerned themselves with activities that promoted vice, laziness, and poverty, all of which were regarded as obstacles to the development of a productive citizenry.<sup>99</sup> Serge Gruzinski argues that this civilizing mission progressively replaced the quest of the Christianization of the New World as the primary social concern of the late Bourbon

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<sup>97</sup> Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred*, pp. 150-176.

<sup>98</sup> Javier Villa-Flores, *Dangerous Speech: A Social History of Blasphemy in Colonial Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006).

<sup>99</sup> Voekel warns that the majority of reformers should not be seen as anti-clerical, as most were deeply religious, Voekel, *Alone before God*.

governments.<sup>100</sup> The transformation from close collaboration to divergent views about what constituted proper behavior took on a new dimension during the eighteenth century.

### **Profiles of Cabello and Vélchez**

The career of Governor Cabello is typical of Bourbon officials during the eighteenth century and stands as an excellent example of how Bourbon administration of Spanish colonies differed from the Habsburg philosophy of decentralized rule. Generally, appointees to governorships in the New World were born in Spain and life-long military officers. Bourbons believed peninsular appointees—especially military ones—would resist local political influences that may attempt to change the course and conduct of reforms that sought to centralize Spanish political and economic rule over its colonies.<sup>101</sup> Cabello began his term of governor of the province of Nicaragua on December 12, 1764.<sup>102</sup> Royal officials promoted the native of León, Spain to the position after his steadfast command of regimental forces during the English siege of Havana in 1762. Cabello's troops harassed English and North American colonial forces from the countryside surrounding Havana during and after the capture of the city.<sup>103</sup> After returning to Spain for a short while, royal officials awarded him with the governorship of

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<sup>100</sup> Serge Gruzinski, *The Conquest of Mexico: The Incorporation of Indian Societies into the Western World, 16th-18th Centuries* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1992).

<sup>101</sup> Many historians of Latin America have shown that this assumption held little water, as peninsular authorities often quickly inserted themselves into political and economic circles out of financial desperation or hopes for financial gain. See Murdo MacLeod, *Spanish Central America: A Socioeconomic History, 1520-1720* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971) and Diana Balmori, Stuart Voss, and Miles Wortman, eds. *Notable Family Networks in Latin America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>102</sup> Domingo Cabello, "Toma de posesion de Domingo Cabello" AGCA, A1.2.2 (5) Exp. 39, Leg. 4

<sup>103</sup> J.R. McNeil, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Nicaragua in 1763. Cabello left the Spanish port of Cadiz with his *criado*, Alfonso de Castro, and a slave from West Africa, Manuel Cabello, and would serve at the post in Nicaragua until July 20, 1776, when officials moved him to Texas to serve as its governor.<sup>104</sup> Over the course of his career, Cabello garnered a reputation as someone willing to take on local interests and enforce the rules and regulations of the Spanish Crown. For example, his enforcement of laws regarding the sale and export of cattle in Texas earned him the scorn of ranchers, who in 1787 sought to censure Cabello and overturn his rulings.<sup>105</sup> While in Nicaragua, Cabello maintained at least one home: one in León and possibly had another (the so-called *casa real*, see Chapter Three) in the largely indigenous town of Masaya.<sup>106</sup>

The typical career trajectory of Cabello serves as an interesting counterpoint to Juan Carlos Vilchez y Cabrera's. Bishop Vilchez was not the type of clergyman usually promoted during the Bourbon period. Bourbon officials wanted similar qualities (loyalty and willingness to implement centralizing reforms) in bishops and other high-ranking ecclesiastical officials as they did in their civil administrators. Once again, these qualifications helped priests from Spain gain high-level positions just like their civil counterparts in the Americas. The Bourbons reversed the Habsburg trend of appointing a significant minority of bishoprics to American-born priests and for most of the eighteenth century appointed almost exclusively peninsular-born bishops. Vilchez was an

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<sup>104</sup> It is up for debate whether the move to Texas was a promotion or not. See Elizabeth A. H. John, *Storms Brewed in Other Men's Worlds: The Confrontation of Indians, Spanish, and French in the Southwest, 1540–1795* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1975) for Cabello's time in Texas. Cabello eventually achieved the rank of Field Marshal commanding all the Spanish troops in Cuba by 1797.

<sup>105</sup> Jack Jackson, *Los Mesteños: Spanish Ranching in Texas, 1721-1821* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1986); and Donald E. Chipman and Harriet Denise Joseph, *Notable Men and Women of Spanish Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

<sup>106</sup>The circumstances of the Casa Real in Masaya will be discussed in chapter three.

exception.<sup>107</sup> He came from a wealthy agricultural and merchant family from Nicaragua in the small Spanish town of Nueva Segovia, about 25 leagues away from León. He held numerous positions within the diocese; prior to his ordination as bishop in the Honduran cathedral of Comayagua, he most recently served as the dean of the seminary in the (yet-unfinished) cathedral in León.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, Vílchez used his family's wealth to advance the diocese's influence and standing in the Americas.<sup>109</sup> He obtained eight additional scholarships for students to attend León's seminary and actively involved himself and his family in obtaining the funds necessary to complete the long-awaited cathedral. To achieve this, Vílchez donated 10,000 pesos to restart construction on the building and donated another 2,000 pesos to the seminary.<sup>110</sup> Vílchez owned at least one slave, Francisco Crespín Iglesia, and held considerable property.<sup>111</sup> Even in death, Vílchez' reputation as a benefactor for pious works remained well-known. His estate received several requests for funds from León's cathedral and La Merced church.<sup>112</sup> The limited source material on Vílchez suggests that his family's wealth and local connections, along with his appointment as bishop made him a powerful political, economic, religious, and social force in late colonial Nicaragua.<sup>113</sup>

Despite their prominent roles as the main political and religious authorities in

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<sup>107</sup> Indeed, Vílchez was only the second Nicaraguan to become León's bishop in more than two hundred years.

<sup>108</sup> Vílchez, at one time or another, held nearly every position in the Nicaraguan diocese.

<sup>109</sup> When completed, the cathedral was to be the largest in Central America and Caribbean Basin.

<sup>110</sup> Arturo Aguilar, *Reseña Histórica de la Diócesis de Nicaragua* (León, Nicaragua: Tipografía Hispicio San Juan de Dios, 1929).

<sup>111</sup> In 1778, Iglesia's widow, Ana María Lezama, asked the estate of the late bishop for funds to support her in old age. AGCA A1.11.35 (5) Leg. 67, Exp. 534 Relatives and acquaintances made similar requests to the estate.

<sup>112</sup> AGCA A1.11.35 (5) Leg. 67 Exp. 535 and 540.

<sup>113</sup> The extended family of Vílchez were also prominent in government and religious affairs. One of his nephews was a priest and held various positions at the cathedral during and after the bishop's life.

Nicaragua and Costa Rica from the mid-1760s to the mid-1770s, academics have shied away from systematic studies of either Vélchez or Cabello. Nineteenth century chroniclers, such as Tomás Ayón and José Dolores Gámez, wrote about some of the major events that occurred during the tenures of Vélchez and Cabello, but rarely attempted to place them within the larger historical context of the period. Scholars of colonial Texas, where Cabello was governor from 1778 to 1786, have examined his life while serving there, but mention only briefly his time in either Cuba or Nicaragua.<sup>114</sup> Scholars of colonial Texas also tend to take a critical view of Cabello, going so far to write that although he had good sense, “His life shows that a man who hated Indians, hated Texas, and hated life at San Antonio could rise above his dislikes and still do a good job during his eight years as governor of Texas.”<sup>115</sup> The two most prolific modern scholars on colonial Nicaragua, Germán Romero Vargas and Jorge Eduardo Arellano, have examined the policies of Cabello in some detail, but have written little about Vélchez or the contentious relationship between the two.<sup>116</sup>

### **Beginning of Dispute**

The arrival of Governor Cabello to Nicaragua set the stage for some of the most contentious disputes during the late colonial period and marked a turning point in relations between royal officials and the Church in the province. Although personal

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<sup>114</sup> Odie Faulk, “Texas During the Administration of Domingo Cabello y Robles, 1778-1786” (M.A. Thesis, Texas Technological College, 1960).

<sup>115</sup> Chipman and Joseph, *Notable Men and Women of Spanish Texas*, p. 179.

<sup>116</sup> Germán Romero Vargas, *Las estructuras sociales de Nicaragua en el siglo XVIII* (Managua, Vanguardia, 1988); Jorge Eduardo Arellano, *Voces indígenas y letras coloniales de Nicaragua y Centroamérica* (Managua, Nicaragua: Centro Nicaragüense de Escritores, 2002). Another prominent Nicaraguan author, Alejandro Montiel Argüello, has written several books on the colonial period as well. For example, see his *Nicaragua Colonial* (Managua: Banco Central de Nicaragua, 2000).

animosity between the governor and bishop exacerbated the situation, the underlying causes of the disputes stemmed from confusion over legal definitions and the application of authority over a wide variety of issues ranging from public decency to the treatment of Indians. On the one hand, the reforms introduced prior to and during the tenure of governor Cabello theoretically strengthened the ability of royal officials to impose their will over the concerns of the clergy. On the other hand, the bishop and other clergy both tried to frustrate the reformist tendencies of royal officials by appealing to tradition, legal precedent, and local custom while at the same time tried to use the new laws to expand the reach of the Church's jurisdictions.

Things between the governor and bishop began well enough. When Governor Cabello arrived in León on December 14, 1764 to take formal possession of his office, the bishop offered the governor the use of the episcopal palace for residence until provisions could be made for permanently housing the governor. The palace, located along the town's main plaza and adjacent to the Cathedral, served as the headquarters for the Church in the province and as the bishop's main residence. Cabello accepted the offer and settled in. A few weeks after his arrival, the governor hosted a party in early January for the elite (*gente principal*) of the city in the episcopal palace to celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany (*Pascua de reyes*). According to various testimonies, including the governor's, the festivities included various dances called "*fandangos*" that lasted well into the night. Little did the governor know that by hosting a party he would be stumbling into a local controversy years in the making.

Some days later, at the ten o'clock mass celebrated on January 19, 1765 the vicar of the cathedral, Dr. Pedro José Chamorro Sotomayor, posted and read aloud a new

decree from Bishop Vilchez. The bishop's decree stated that anyone who attended private parties (*fiestas*) where “lewd, shameful, and indecent acts” occurred and mock religious rituals took place would be subject to excommunication from the Catholic Church.<sup>117</sup> Later, in a letter to the Audiencia authorities in Guatemala defending his decree, the bishop detailed what happened at these parties supported by testimonies from several witnesses. While some of the details about the beginning of the case are unclear, what is apparent in the testimonies provided by various witnesses is that a culture of having and attending private parties developed in Nicaragua in 1762, when several new dances (among them sarabandas, fandangos, *pasapies*, waltzes, and minuets) were introduced in León to social gatherings surrounding Holy Week celebrations.<sup>118</sup>

Testimonies provided by the bishop argue that someone who claimed he came from the northwest Spanish province of Galicia, but was actually a Frenchman, was the person responsible for introducing residents of Nicaragua to the lewd dances. In a few short years, it seems that house parties featuring these types of dances became more popular. According to detractors, by 1765 these parties became “more frequent and increasingly liberated [from proper moral behavior] against the honor of many citizens, principally the nobles (*con mas libertad y frecuencia contra la honor de muchos vecinos, y principalmente de los nobles*).<sup>119</sup> The bishop also took pains to link the immoral dances directly to the governor. The bishop collected five statements from individuals

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<sup>117</sup> These testimonies and related documents may be found in “Testimonio de los exhortos librados por el gobernador de Nicaragua, al Obispo de dicha provincial sobre que levante la exmonición que lanzó, contra las personas que organicen y asistan a bailes” in AGCA A1.11.39 (5) exp. 576, leg. 71. This particular phrase may be found in folio 2.

<sup>118</sup> For example, the testimonies of Capitan Don Pedro Manuel de Ayendi and Don Francisco Esteban Sánchez illustrate this point. See folios 32 (verso) through folio 36 in “Testimonio...” ACGA A1.11.39 (5) exp. 576, leg. 71.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., Folio 43 (right side).

that indicated that the governor took part in these parties. When asked whether the governor hosted parties that lasted until the early morning hours, five individuals, which included priests and a captain of the militia, said yes.<sup>120</sup>

More troubling than the frequency and duration of the parties, however, was what allegedly occurred during them. The supposed immoral acts at the parties concerned some residents of León and provided the bishop with the claims he needed to expand the Church's jurisdiction into a realm normally reserved for government officials. The bishop claimed the 'public sins' (*pecados públicos*) that occurred at the parties gave him a mandate to intervene. He argued that he had personally seen and been told by various members of his congregation that at these parties men and women, both single and married, drank in excess *aguardiente*, a hard alcohol usually made out of sugarcane, so much so that they would stumble out onto the various patios and *solares* (private lots) of the city and cause disturbances; party-goers had inappropriate physical contact with one another which included hugging and kissing improperly while dancing; strangers from out of town would congregate at the parties; and most dangerously, party-goers participated in idolatrous practices that mocked images of saints and while dancing the *sarabanda* they simulated wakes for dead children while using votive candles.<sup>121</sup> The

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<sup>120</sup> All that acknowledged this fact also made it clear that the governor lived in a house that he rented from the Church. Folios 35, 37, and 37 (verso).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.; The essence of the bishop's argument can be found in the following quotation: "los pecados Publicos, y escandalosos que executas en los Bayles, y fandangos, que asi intitulan a el que se combocan, y caconbridan, mugeres, y hombres Casados, y solteros, pactandose de in abrasarse, y vesanse en los bayles, y fandangos, en que Vesan acciones deshonestas, y provocativas, como son [con?] tomarse las manos, los hombres, y las mugeres con a de manes impuros abrasandose, y Vesandose, los rostros con tanta livertad, que hasta la Gente vulgar se escandaliza, otros Vian [Van?] con titulo de Sanabanda, en que simular sus hechos con la Vela de un Santo, o la de un Nino que ha muerto, Mesclandose mu[jeres]gers, y hombres bebiendo Aguardiente, y manteniendose toda una noche en este deshorden..." transcription mine.

participants performed these actions with so much reckless abandon, the bishop wrote to the Audiencia officials, that the *gente vulgar* (the common people) were scandalized. Individuals implicated in attending these parties—including the governor—offered that while there had been an increase in the number of house parties, the intensity or substance of the parties had not degenerated into improper behavior. Later, in a letter to Vilchez and Audiencia officials, Governor Cabello reprimanded the bishop for overstepping his legal authority.<sup>122</sup>

The allegations made by the bishop and the denials of the governor offer clues to the competing visions of society and the role that the Church had in policing behavior at the end of the colonial period. As mentioned above, scholars have examined many instances in late-colonial Spanish America where the interests of the royal officials and the clergy came together to maintain colonial order.<sup>123</sup> Most often, this tacit arrangement sought to restrain non-sanctioned activities that could disrupt society and instead tried to promote a more rational, well-behaved, public. However, during the tenures of Governor Cabello and Bishop Vilchez, the Crown and clergy found their ideas of the relationship between Church and royal officials, propriety, and civic space at odds with one another. Whether true or not, the bishop's litany of complaints against the dances were surely meant to convince Audiencia officials that local conditions necessitated quick and direct action, and that the Church was the institution to undertake the necessary measures.

One of the first things mentioned in the bishop's letter stated that the dances

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid. More on Cabello's response to the bishop is located below.

<sup>123</sup> For example, Rodríguez-Saenz, "Relaciones Ilicitas..."; Viquiera Alban, *Propriety and Permissiveness*; In addition to a better behaved public, Cheryl English Martin found that civil and religious authorities also came together to create a more industrious workforce by limiting the number of feast-days and holidays in Chihuahua. See Martin, "Public Celebrations, Popular Culture, and Labor Discipline in Eighteenth-Century Chihuahua" in Beezley and Martin, eds., *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*. (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1994).

originated from outsiders and that unknown men participated in the parties. By suggesting that a foreigner (the Frenchman purporting to be a Galician) was responsible for the introduction of provocative dances, the bishop placed the blame for these parties on some unknown person from outside the community and not on the residents. Moreover, this assertion played on the traditional fear of the outsider in Spanish and Spanish American society.<sup>124</sup> It also, conveniently, deflected criticism that the bishop allowed scandalous behavior to develop within his own flock organically.

The dishonor that local women brought upon themselves also provided a justification for the bishop to intervene. According to the Vílchez, the unnatural mixing of the sexes, where men from all walks of life (be they mulattos, strangers, or otherwise devious) could meet, dance, and act scandalously with local women required immediate action. The dances, the bishop argued, brought shame upon parents and provided poor examples to the Spanish maidens (*doncellas*) of Nicaragua's principal cities. The bishop also related a popular rumor to Audiencia officials that demonstrated the far-reaching effects that the dances had on the reputation of the province. The story went that in January 1765, a conversation in León took place between a 'friend' and an unnamed person from out of town. The friend asked what the guest's intention in the city was and the guest replied that he wanted to find a wife. The friend then said that that prior to the arrival of the dances the town and women had been honorable, but now the town had no

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<sup>124</sup> Outsiders, or *forasteros*, have long been thought of as a vector for the introduction of new and dangerous ideas. Mistrust of outsiders extended into daily life in many ways. For example, the credit system, which allowed the daily economy to function, was built upon knowing people within a particular community. Douglas C. Cope describes how the credit system in colonial Mexico operated in *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico, 1660-1720* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

honor and the women were undesirable to marry.<sup>125</sup> The story communicated to officials that single Spanish men (and the wealth and merchant contacts they brought with them) might begin to avoid Nicaragua, because the women of marriageable age had developed bad reputation.

The allegations of holding mock religious rituals likewise provided the bishop with a reason to publicly intervene in the stopping the fiestas. To him, the rumors of mock religious rituals and the signing of satirical songs to the tunes of the Hail Mary and the Lord's Prayer violated some of the Church's most sacred elements. Moreover, the bishop wrote that the party-goers had, in his words, “abandoned God, have no respect for Him, [and] have lost all of their fear [of God] and [their] shame”.<sup>126</sup> By stating that the parties deliberately engaged in satanic acts and heretical behavior, the bishop laid part of the groundwork for his case, since he could justifiably claim that as a matter of doctrine and faith, he had the right to intervene.

Finally, after the listing the moral and social dangers of the fiestas, the bishop appealed to Audiencia officials' pocketbook in order to gain their support. He argued that the vast sums of money that fiesta hosts spent on their guests (food, alcohol, and music) wasted the resources of an already impoverished province. Later, in a letter to Governor Cabello, the bishop was even more direct about the drain on the economy. The bishop asked the governor, “why, in a town so lacking in things, should people be spending so much money on drinks and banquets for parties?” Bishop Vélchez then added “that in of all of the province's history it was richer in funds and honor because there were no fandangoes”. Clearly, the bishop believed that not only did the dances threaten the honor

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<sup>125</sup> “Testimonio...”f. 18v.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., f. 22

of women and the souls of the party-goers, but they also squandered what little wealth the isolated frontier province had.<sup>127</sup>

### **The Bishop Acts, The Governor Protests**

In his letter to audiencia officials rationalizing his decision to excommunicate the governor and others, the bishop noted that he that he had repeatedly complained in sermons to his parishioners and tried to get local officials to put a stop to the inappropriate parties. However, no help from local officials (many of whom allegedly attended the parties) came. Indeed, because of the inaction of the local officials to stop the parties, the bishop claimed that it was the *fault* of royal officials that the parties even took place.<sup>128</sup> The lack of action on the part of the governor and his subordinates to stop the parties, according to Vélchez, compelled the bishop to act.

To ensure that people stopped attending the licentious parties, the bishop took several steps. First, he compelled public and royal scribes in the two most populous cities, León and Granada, to write official decrees that were posted all over the province that banned *all* types of private social gatherings. Second, the bishop created the post of a new *alguacil mayor* (town sheriff or constable) who would enforce the decree. Third, the bishop included a provision to provide an armed escort of mulatto militiamen to assist the new *alguacil mayor* in his duties. Finally, the bishop warned that anyone caught attending the parties would be excommunicated from the Church.

The bishop's unilateral actions against the parties without the permission of royal authorities provoked governor Cabello's ire. Three months after the bishop's ban took

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<sup>127</sup> AGCA A1.11.39 (5) Exp. 576 Leg. 71, Folio 19.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. f. 22

place the governor filed a carefully-prepared suit against the bishop and accused him of abusing his religious authority. The governor also forwarded a copy to the bishop. In his suit, Cabello charged that the bishop had zealously overstepped his ecclesiastical authority, especially with the creation of the new alguacil mayor position. The governor also took care to categorically deny that any illicit or immoral activities took place at the dances, especially at the dance that he hosted in the episcopal palace.<sup>129</sup> Most importantly, the governor proclaimed that the bishop had no legal authority to do anything in this matter except excommunicate individuals. The governor also noted that even if the dances were illicit and lewd, he could not believe that Vélchez would want to send so many of his flock to spiritual ruin. Cabello further promised to defend the royal jurisdiction by all means and warned the bishop to reverse his censure since it tried to invalidate royal law and public law (*potestad publica*).<sup>130</sup>

Upon receiving a copy of Cabello's letter to Audiencia officials, the bishop wrote to the governor and demanded that the governor show him the specific royal cédula that declared that bishops could not take the steps that Vélchez had taken.<sup>131</sup> The governor's protest of the bishop's extralegal actions underscored the high degree of uncertainty that the uneven application of Bourbon legal reforms had on institutions in Spanish America. In his written statement to the Audiencia, Cabello argued that the bishop's actions went against the customs and laws that up until that point had allowed the two jurisdictions to

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., f. 2-3 (v).

<sup>130</sup> AGCA A1.11.39 (5), Exp. 576, Leg. 71, folios 1-2v.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., The exact quote, "Si hay cédula como dice el Senor Govenrador, en que Su Magestad (que Dios Guarde) manda que los Prelados Ecleciasticos no puedan prohibir estos excesos dice su senoria obispo se le muestre, para que con su Vista quedar por aora [ahora?], segura su conciencia, en el interin se ocurre, a S. M. Para que declare si con la simulacion de divercion se hayan de toleran estos deshordenes, por que los Bayles ni los ha prohibido se eminicania obispo, ni lo intenta hacer, y entre tanto no se le muestra de esta Real cédula para obedecerla protesta su eminicia obispo, quando puede, y deve, y solo buelve a la Magestad Soberada de Dion Nstro."

work in harmony. He cited several cédulas that summarized this system, such as one from 1757, which stated that civil and religious officials were to work together in the prosecution of public crimes.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, the governor produced a cédula from 2 April 1760, in which the king sided with the governor of the Yucatan, who was embroiled in a similar dispute with the local bishop over the clergy's right to prevent public sins.<sup>133</sup> Cabello made it clear that all illegal and immoral dances, and immoral activities of any kind, would be prosecuted. However, he disagreed with the bishop's judgment that the fiestas endangered the souls of the party goers. Furthermore, while Cabello stressed that he administered justice according the cédula of 1757 and worked with Church officials, he also pointed out to Audiencia officials that civil authorities had the exclusive prerogative to grant licenses to other public gatherings, such as plays and bullfights (*comedias y fiestas del toros*).

Governor Cabello's appeals did little to sway the bishop, who continued his ban on parties. As the dispute wore on, so did the governor's patience for the bishop. More than one year later, on April 2 1767, the governor used more forceful language when describing the situation between himself and the bishop. Cabello claimed that the bishop went beyond his ecclesiastical authority and actually usurped royal power. In a sign of frustration, the governor even declared that no other prelate that he ever encountered was similar to Vilchez, as the rest had submitted to royal authority at some level. The bishop also increased the tone and rhetoric against the lack of action on the part of the civilian

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., folio 7.

<sup>133</sup> The events in the Yucatan took place in 1758, when Bishop Ignacio Padilla Estrada threatened excommunication of scribes who notarized bills of sale on obras pias and capellanías. The bishop also made the scribes publish bans against plays, dances, and bullfights. The royal cédula of 2 April 1760 stated that royal orders dating back to the 1670s clearly give civil authorities power to oversee many religious operations, especially those concerning the administration of obras pias.

administration. Evidence submitted by Vélchez to the Audiencia of Guatemala included sworn statements from laymen and clergy who supported his decision.<sup>134</sup> They too claimed that immoral behavior occurred at the dances and that men and women, *vecino* and stranger, white and mulatto mixed unnaturally. One such testimony, from Fr. Santiago Salcedo also complained that after the governor made public his doubts about the bishop's right to ban parties, the *gente ignorante* (ignorant people) of León came out into the night, claiming that the governor gave them license to sin. According to Salcedo, they gathered beneath the windows of the episcopal palace and one of the convents with their guitars and defiantly sang throughout the night.<sup>135</sup>

While Audiencia officials debated the legalities of whether or not Church officials had the legal rights to ban private parties, Governor Cabello used information about illicit activities within the cathedral to turn the tables on the bishop. On 31 July 1767, Cabello informed royal officials in Guatemala that José Garrido, a free mulato who was married, was found *in flagrante delicto* with a white woman who was not his wife. Garrido, who sometimes served as one of Bishop Vélchez' domestic servants, was a musician in the cathedral. According to Silvestre de Prado, who was with the bishop and a nephew of an *alcalde ordinario* (a local magistrate), when news of Garrido's arrest reached the bishop, he flew into a rage, and supposedly made negative remarks about the governor.<sup>136</sup> The Cabello pressed his advantage and used testimony given by Prado to claim that the bishop had publicly defamed him.<sup>137</sup> Although the *fiscal* in Guatemala chose not to do anything about the matter of the Governor's honor (and Garrido remained in jail), the dispute

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid, Folios 10 through 41.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., f 38 v.

<sup>136</sup> Prado happened to be the nephew of the *alcalde* who arrested Garrido.

<sup>137</sup> AGCA A1.11.39 (5) Exp. 575 Leg. 71, "Queja del Governado de la Provincia de León de Nicaragua sobre las Palabras injuriosas que en publico produeso el Ytmo Senor Obispo contra citado Governador"

clearly demonstrates the poor state of relations between the governor and bishop.

The Audiencia finally reached its decision on 18 November 1767. In the end, it left many questions about the nature of the dances unanswered, as the court could not determine if they were illicit based on the conflicting testimonies. Yet the decision firmly put limits on the power of Church officials to intervene in public and private gatherings. The Guatemalan court ruled that notoriously obscene and provocative dances were subject to ecclesiastical authority and could be prohibited. However, this authority could not be extended to the outright banning of dances between men and women. Indeed, the fiscal noted that even in “honest and decent European courts” (filled with princes and priests) dancing was permitted. Furthermore, the courts left it up to local secular authorities to decide what constituted inappropriate dancing.<sup>138</sup>

The hazy definition of traditional judicial roles helps to explain why the bishop and governor failed to come to terms with one another on a range of issues dealing with public morality and the proper role for the Church in colonial society. Each could call upon legal precedent, royal directives, and tradition to back up their claim. Furthermore, each had a cadre of lower officials that could testify to their cause. The blurred border between the sacred and profane in colonial society ultimately played out in lengthy Audiencia trials, public acts of defiance, and personal attacks.<sup>139</sup> The ramifications of the conflict between Governor Cabello and Bishop Vilchez and the Church and state continued to be felt in Nicaragua during the rest of the colonial period. As both men settled into their roles as either the political or religious leader of Nicaragua in the mid

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., A short summary of this case can also be found in Alejandro Montiel Argüello, *Nicaragua Colonial* (Managua: Banco Central de Nicaragua, 2000), pp.345-349

<sup>139</sup> AGCA A1.11.39 (5) Exp. 575 Leg. 71. For the bishop’s interpretation of his legal position, see folios 32, 34, 55 and 70. For the governor’s position, see folios 2-3, 45 (verso) and 89.

1760s, they mounted personal and political attacks that were not soon forgotten. Moreover, confusion over authority over various aspects of public behavior represented a legal 'grey area' that Church and civil officials had to negotiate and come to an understanding if other problems were to be avoided. While this legal disorder occurred elsewhere in Spanish America, the proceedings that occurred in Nicaragua are notable for the high-level officials involved in the dispute, the tenacity of both sides in defending their decisions and actions, and the seemingly bizarre set of circumstances surrounding the tenure of both Cabello and Vélchez.<sup>140</sup> Although rulings by the Audiencia of Guatemala and intervention by the President of the Audiencia occasionally settled matters for the short term, they did little to clear up the legal chaos of the late-eighteenth century. These difficulties highlight the dramatic shift in policies undertaken by the Bourbons and draws attention how reformers implemented those new policies in a society still steeped in Habsburg institutions and attitudes.

Finally, the bishop's actions should not be taken in isolation of larger trends within the Church in Spanish America. Indeed, his stance on public indecency, illicit unions, and scandalous behavior largely fall in line with the Church's teachings. For example, in 1766, the Mexican Inquisition outlawed what they deemed indecent folk songs and aggressively prosecuted anyone involved in performing them with assistance from the royal government. Although the efforts to eradicate songs, such as the '*Chuchumbe*' and '*Pan de jarabe*' [both euphemisms for a penis], among others, from the streets largely failed, it represented, as Viquiera Alban noted, a convergence of goals between the Church and the colonial state. The difference between the successful push to

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<sup>140</sup> The cases cited by Farriss usually pit the ayuntamiento (city council), governor, or viceroy against a singular parish priest or a low-ranking Church official.

ban lewd songs in Mexico and the failed attempt of banning fiestas in Nicaragua was not just a matter of scope. The unilateral actions taken by the bishop ignored royal authority during a time of shifting legal boundaries and his reliance on personally attacking the governor's reputation led to the failure of the ban.

### **The Feud Spreads**

During and after the long-running dispute between the governor and bishop over proper behavior at fandangos, other issues cropped up between the respective heads of Spanish authority in Nicaragua. Whether or not these disputes can be attributed to the poor relationship between Cabello and Vilchez is unclear. For that matter, whether priests and royal officials were self-serving or acting in the best interests of the people, Church, Crown, or community, is impossible to know. Whatever the motivations for bringing allegations of corruption and abuse to light, vague delineations of authority between Church and state compounded the problem.

Another flashpoint between Church and royal officials was the treatment and administration of Indians. While this area had long been a source of conflict between Church and royal officials, the new legal environment of the late eighteenth century and a renewed sense of determination by royal officials to wrest some control of Indian communities away from priests fueled legal challenges to ecclesiastical authority.<sup>141</sup> On one hand, local royal officials, such as corregidores, frequently complained in letters to the governor that priests charged for their services, intervened in local political affairs, and

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<sup>141</sup> To be clear, these charges were not new. Accusations of priestly or royal abuse of natives date back to the early sixteenth century. The Spanish Crown tried at various points to curtail some of these abuses, such as the 1512 Laws of Burgos and the 1542 New Laws, but as Bartolome de las Casas and others showed, these steps were not sufficient to stop most abuses.

encroached upon royal authority. Church figures countered that royal officials also took advantage of Indian communities and that the Church only looked after and guided the faithful.

Allegations of interference in the local political structures of indigenous communities went beyond abstract ideas on the limits of royal or ecclesiastical authority. These disputes also had tangible economic and political stakes for those involved, for although most individual Indians could be classified as 'poor', collectively, indigenous communities held considerable wealth and property. Most often, this wealth was held in *cofradías* and *cajas de comunidades* (community coffers), which (in theory) were managed by elected local indigenous authorities, independent of outside influence. However, in practice, both the clergy and royal officials tried to influence when, where, and how communities spent these funds and, most importantly, who allocated them. Furthermore, although Indians had few resources, priests and royal officials placed a high value (real and symbolic) on their labors.<sup>142</sup>

One conflict between Church and royal officials in 1767 touched off a wave of investigations and counter-investigations that, on their surface, sought to root out corruption and exploitation.<sup>143</sup> These court cases also coincided with the much larger dispute between Governor Cabello and Bishop Vilchez over the regulation of dances and private activities. Don Santiago Vilchez y Cabrera, who was the priest of El Viejo and surrounding communities, complained to his uncle (Bishop Vilchez) that the *justicia mayor* of the port of Realejo interfered with his work and kept the Indians of the area

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<sup>142</sup> By 'real' value I mean the value of their labor that went toward producing specific goods or providing services. 'Symbolic' value was important for Spaniards who valued the social prestige of having, for example, domestic servants or large numbers of indigenous peoples working for them.

<sup>143</sup> Other examples of abuse not concerning the clergy will be addressed in chapter three.

unhappy, forced them to work, and kept them practically naked.<sup>144</sup> The bishop wrote to the high court in Guatemala to ask for the problematic official to be removed. However, the court wrote back and claimed that it would not do anything and that the bishop and his nephew should examine the *Recopilación de Indias* which stated that “ecclesiastics are prohibited from interfering with royal jurisdiction” (*que prohiben a los eclesiásticos mezclarse en actos de jurisdicción real*) and agreed with the *justicia mayor*'s (chief magistrate) claim that the priest interfered with his administration of the region.<sup>145</sup>

Subsequent investigations into other priests also brought up instances of wrongdoing of Santiago Vélchez. In August 1774, eight witnesses came forward to Governor Cabello to complain that the priests of Subtiava, El Viejo, and other towns charged money for services they rendered, such as the saying of mass. The accusations went back several years and listed, among others, Santiago Vélchez. Other witnesses spoke about being forced to provide labor to the priests of the area, often without compensation.<sup>146</sup> In that same year, when violence erupted in Telica (a small town outside of Subtiava) the local *corregidor* (sometimes also called an *alcalde*—a local official with administrative and judicial powers—see Chapter Four), Don Francisco de la Rocha, brought forth numerous charges on the local priest. In his report, de la Rocha noted that a priest named Don Miguel Chamorro visited Telica to hear confession. A large crowd (500 according to Chamorro) gathered to confess their sins but soon became

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<sup>144</sup> El Viejo refers to El Viejo de Chinandega, a town about 10 miles to the NE from Realejo.

<sup>145</sup> “Expediente en que se hallan los oficios pasados a el Señor Obispo de Nicaragua Don Juan Calros Vélchez y Cabrera por el Señor Dr. Don Basilio de Villanueva a consecuencia de los resultado en el Acuerdo de 24 de diciembre de 1768 con motivo y en vista de la representaciones hechas a la Real Audiencia por el Justiaia maior del Realejo Don Sebastian de Labaynu sus thas 17 de Septiembre y 30 de Noviembre del ano citado que corren en que no se parado” A1.11.31 (5) Exp. 466 Leg. 53. The specific law was Ley 6<sup>th</sup> Tit. 13 Libro 1.

<sup>146</sup> AGCA,A1 (5) Exp. 454 Leg. 51 (17 Oct 1774)

impatient because of the long wait. Later, a fight broke out between the priest (and some supporters) and a number of Indians, among them the *alcalde* and the town scribe.

Chamorro later attempted to have the *alcalde* and town scribe removed from office. The *corregidor* charged the priest with abusing the local Indians and interfering with local politics. Governor Cabello supported de la Rocha and asked Guatemalan authorities to discipline the priest. Before the Guatemalan court could rule, the Bishop removed Chamorro from Subtiava and put him to work in the cathedral. This seemed to defuse the situation, but during the period between 1767 and 1784, there were 21 other incidents where Church officials explicitly were charged with interfering with royal authority.<sup>147</sup>

Sometimes the disputes between religious and secular officials were not as clear-cut and could lead to drawn out legal disputes that rarely ended in charges. One of the largest Indian towns in Nicaragua, Subtiava, which adjoins the Spanish city (and provincial capital) of León, found itself at the center of a dispute between royal and Church leaders over contested local elections. The royal *corregidor*, Don Alfonso de Castro, complained to authorities in Guatemala in May of 1767 that Bishop Vilchez unduly influenced the election of Subtiava's *mayordomo mayor* (chief representative) by telling the local priest (Don Felipe de Castro y Gordillo) to suggest to the community that Pedro Antón Rodríguez, and only him, should hold the position. Castro called off the elections and moved to arrest Antón, who was in the process of transferring some of the *cofradía's* livestock to herds that belonged to the Church under the cover of

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<sup>147</sup> For Example, AGCA, A1 (5) Exp. 455 Leg. 51 (17 Oct 1783). In this documents the *alcaldes*, *regidores*, *principales*, and '*comun*' of all four *partidos* of Matagalpa complained about the '*contributions*' given to the priests Josef Luis Laneas (sp?) and Fr. Francisco Lopez. Laneas demanded a '*ration*' of four chickens, four '*medios*' of corn, and four '*tantos*' of manteca, salt, and firewood.

darkness.<sup>148</sup> Castro eventually caught up to Antón before the cattle could be moved. Antón fled the scene and sought refuge in Subtiava's church, but was caught before he could enter. For Castro, the bishop's meddling in local Indian affairs prompted him to collect testimonies against the bishop in order to 'defend Royal jurisdiction from irregular proceedings'.<sup>149</sup>

Castro's investigation, which he forwarded to Governor Cabello and officials in Guatemala, also found other irregularities. The allegations of misconduct allowed Governor Cabello to temporarily shut down Subtiava's *caja de comunidad*, since he believed that Antón could still influence others in the community to use the funds inappropriately. According to testimony taken from Antón while in jail, the bishop had ordered him to distribute the cattle into the Church's custody. Antón later produced a note from the bishop that stated that “it would be a service to God, the Church, and the city, if he [Antón] was the *mayordomo de fábrica*,” (chief) which controlled both finances and cattle of the community.<sup>150</sup> Castro also noted to royal officials that Antón had a 'stack of criminal charges' against him from previous years, yet because of his friends in the Church, to which he always fled to for protection, little had been done. Nine Indians from Subtiava also testified to Castro that Vilchez pressured them to elect Antón. They revealed that they had decided to elect Juan Centeno, because he was accountable and appropriate for the job, but were told by the priest to select the seventy-one year old Antón instead.

The bishop's response to the charges against Antón and himself attempted to negate the most serious offenses, shift the blame to royal officials, and once again, claim

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<sup>148</sup> AGI, Guatemala,545 “Cartas y Expedientes”, 1767, no. 15

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., f.1

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, f 6. The letter was dated 28 June 1765, when Vilchez was the bishop-elect.

that the Church had exclusive jurisdiction over the matters. The bishop stated that it was actually Corregidor Castro who harassed the people of Subtiava and mismanaged their funds. Vilchez produced twenty-two witnesses who listed a number of offenses against the corregidor. Among the complaints the residents charged the corregidor with: making women produce cotton thread for a low wage; forcing villagers to give up half of their eggs, vegetables, and chickens; enslaving Indians to work in his home. Furthermore, Bishop Vilchez explained to Audiencia officials that the town dedicated so much of its money to the Church (in the form of alms) because of their strong faith. The bishop also defended the role that he played in putting Antón in charge of the mayordomo, whom he requested to be released from jail. He argued that since the *cofradía* associated with the church in Subtiava, its goods could be administered by the Church. Thus, the bishop could appoint anyone to the position. To add legal standing to his cause, the bishop noted that laws 151 and 152 in the *Recopilación de las Indias* (Laws of the Indies) gave authority to the Church to manage monies (including alms and cattle) for the saying of mass. The prelate observed that by removing Church influence among religious brotherhoods, royal officials 'practiced the same error as the followers of [Martin] Luther'.<sup>151</sup>

Corregidor Castro vigorously protested these accusations and countered with more testimony that expanded upon the original charges. Castro noted the bishop's continued involvement in the local affairs of Subtiava put the region in danger since it undermined his authority, and as a royal decree from 26 February 1761 made it clear, a bishop could not usurp a corregidor's authority. Thus, Castro argued that the bishop violated royal law. Castro also accused the bishop of manipulating local affairs during

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid, cuaderno 4.

the tenure of the previous corregidor, Juan Grau.

In light of the numerous allegations against Castro, the officials in Spain found that Castro's case against the bishop was motivated by falsehoods. The officials noted that the excesses committed by Castro clearly violated Spanish law and that an investigation of both Castro and Grau would commence.<sup>152</sup> Ultimately, the alleged acts of cruelty and exploitation by the corregidores rendered Castro's initial inquiry into the bishop's role in Subtiava off the table. The Crown made no explicit ruling on how much influence the clergy should have on an indigenous community.<sup>153</sup>

## **Conclusions**

In a departure from earlier conflicts between the Church and the state, which mainly concerned themselves with the management of Indians, the disputes between Governor Cabello and Bishop Vilchez mostly occurred over public and private behaviors of an urban, mainly Hispanicized, population. As noted by other scholars, these types of quarrels expressed changing notions of the role of religion and the state in colonial society.

In their arguments to Spanish authorities, the clergy stressed the Church's time-honored role in policing immoral behavior, administering community funds, and looking out for the welfare of Indians for their reasons to remain active in community affairs. Royal officials argued that new practices and royal decrees placed the supervision of the community's activities in the hands of civil authorities.<sup>154</sup> The ambiguous, and often contradictory, statements and decrees from the king, the Council of Indies, and other

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<sup>152</sup> The Fiscal specified that the corregidores were in violation of Ley 37, Titulo 18, Libro 2 of the Laws of the Indies.

<sup>153</sup> AGI, Guatemala, 545 "Cartas y Expedientes", 1767, no. 15

<sup>154</sup> "Testimonio..." AGCA A1.11.39 (5) exp. 576, leg. 71 folios 12-18.

high-ranking colonial officials only added to the legal disorder. The back and forth allegations of corruption and overreaches of legal authority represented serious obstacles to the Spain's attempt to modernize and centralize their colonies in the New World. The isolation and frontier status of Nicaragua allowed these disputes to take on an added sense of urgency and, due to the small population, embroiled large swaths of the Spanish elite. These types of conflicts created confusion in local and regional bureaucracies as to which institution had authority to regulate aspects of daily life. In some instances, such as during the governorship of Cabello, conflicts between the Church and Crown exacerbated local rivalries, especially among the Spanish. In many respects, the divided rule between Church and royal authorities—a legacy of Habsburg rule—continued to check excessive egregious abuses and frustrated most attempts at consolidating power in the hands of one person or institution.

Chapter Two:  
Contraband, Smuggling, and Illegal Trade in Bourbon Central America, 1700-1808

On 24 November 1785, Captain Cristóbal Bernal left the Spanish port of Trujillo and headed along the Honduran coast with fifteen soldiers. Bernal's superiors had not ordered him to patrol for British or Moskito raiding parties—although they often ventured into Spanish-controlled territories from the Yucatan to Panama—but rather to find and arrest anyone engaged in contraband activities. A few days after leaving Trujillo, heading inland, Bernal and his troops came upon thirteen residents of Comayagua who were on their way back from the coast with illegal British merchandise. Bernal promptly put the *contrabandistas* under arrest. The successful efforts of the patrol, however, were short-lived. That same evening, as they stopped for rest at a farm, the detachment of troops came under attack from an unknown number of assailants. The attackers used the cover of darkness to sneak up to the camp and surround it. They fired into the encampment, wounding everyone in the detachment—including Bernal—and killed one of the soldiers and one of the prisoners. The remaining prisoners used the commotion caused by the attack to slip away from the Spanish patrol. Even worse for the group of soldiers, the assailants harassed and terrorized Bernal's troops into the next day, following them all the way back to the Spanish fort in Trujillo. In their haste, the troops were forced to leave the confiscated merchandise behind. Not surprisingly, when Spanish troops returned to the farm, the British goods had disappeared.<sup>155</sup>

Smuggling, tax evasion, and illicit trade had long shaped life in Central America as a means to access the global economy. In keeping with Spanish (and European)

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<sup>155</sup> The detachment included eleven members of the militia, one sergeant, and three ‘veteran’ soldiers. AGI, Guatemala, 413, “Causa contra contrabandistas quien atacaron tropas de Trujillo” 15 Oct., 1789.

custom and law, the Crown and the merchant guild that controlled foreign trade tried to prohibit unauthorized trading with Spain's new colonies in the Americas. These policies kept competitors out and profits high. However, these restrictions effectively marginalized areas of the empire that lacked profitable exports or large, sedentary populations. Although largely bypassed by Spanish merchants, residents of Central America still desired manufactured and consumer goods from Europe and Asia, and wanted the opportunity to export goods of their own. Utilizing illicit channels often provided the only way for goods to enter these colonial backwaters. Although legally barred from trading with Spanish subjects in the New World, Dutch, English and French trade ships soon regularly plied the waters of the Caribbean and Atlantic by the mid sixteenth century and the Pacific soon after that.<sup>156</sup>

This chapter examines illegal trade from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the end of the colonial period in the Spanish provinces of Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. Sources are drawn from a wide range of official documentation, including: statements drawn up by customs officials when they seized illegal merchandise at ports; military and militia dispatches on the movement and capture of smugglers; correspondence between Spanish officials; tax collectors' reports of tax evasion; documents from officials in charge of royal monopolies; and letters from British agents and merchants in London, Jamaica, and the Mosquito Coast. I argue that while the mechanics of illegal trade in Central America remained more or less the same throughout the colonial period, Bourbon attempts to maximize colonial remittances to Spain through new economic policies contributed to the expansion of an already flourishing black

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<sup>156</sup> These ships also frequently resorted to piracy as well. See, Taylor Mack, "Contraband Trade through Trujillo, Honduras, 1720s-1782" *Yearbook Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers* Vol 24, 1998, pp. 45-56.

market. This chapter also highlights the evolving nature of the social and economic effects of the reforms Spain introduced in its colonies and confirms what others have found elsewhere, that the economic reforms often proved to be arbitrarily and haphazardly implemented. Furthermore, an over-reliance on armed groups to enforce economic regulations proved to be an ineffective and expensive deterrent to illegal trade. Finally, this chapter demonstrates the varied popular and elite responses to the Bourbon economic reforms that ranged from acceptance to resistance and exposes the limits of Spanish authority in the late colonial period.

Over the course of several weeks, the military commander of Trujillo, Lt. Col. Gabriel Hervais received a number of testimonies about the attack and the supposed identity of the attackers. Among those implicated in the contraband trade and the attack on the patrol were an ‘excessive number of vecinos’ from Comayagua and José Andurain, a *teniente* (subordinate of a local colonial official) of the nearby province of Olanchito. Although the fate of the men involved is unclear, in a letter to Hervais Audiencia officials demanded that anyone caught resisting arrest should be put to death while those that willingly gave up would be sentenced to ten years military service in Spanish *presidios*.<sup>157</sup>

Military and royal officials had long known that the region was a hotbed of illegal trade.<sup>158</sup> Indeed, the prevention of contraband was one of the main reasons why Spain

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<sup>157</sup> The usual destination for men condemned to presidio duty was either Africa or another remote fort in the Americas. The mortality rates for these places were usually very high.

<sup>158</sup> Generally speaking, illegal trade in the late colonial period could be broken into one of four categories: (1) evading customs duties or other taxes; (2) trading with foreign merchants; (3) selling stolen goods; (4) trading in restricted goods covered by a government monopoly. These four categories will be analyzed further below.

reoccupied the town of Trujillo in 1779 after its official abandonment some ninety-six years earlier.<sup>159</sup> The reoccupation of Trujillo, however, did little to stop the flow of illegal merchandise through the region. Not only did the area's many bays, inlets, and mangrove swamps provide hundreds of clandestine locations for goods to be traded without the knowledge of the authorities, the situation was further complicated by the presence of hostile Indians and a number of British traders, loggers, and planters living along the region known as the Mosquito Coast.<sup>160</sup> Any action taken by Spanish officials against the traders was dangerous since it had the potential to create a much larger conflict. That lesson was learned in the 1750s by two governors of Costa Rica and the commander of the fort of Omoa, when they over-zealously attacked the contraband trade coming into the cacao-producing region near Matina, which provoked violent responses from the British and their Moskito allies and nearly caused a war between the two empires.<sup>161</sup>

The sparsely populated eastern regions of Central America and the nearby presence of Spain's enemies made ending illegal trade difficult, if not impossible. Further complicating the situation was the active participation of Spanish officials and subjects in smuggling, which earned many Spanish officials and towns near British settlements reputations as untrustworthy and corrupt. Prior to the ambush of Bernal's men, Hervais

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<sup>159</sup> Trujillo was gradually abandoned by the Spanish due to a number of factors: an environment that the Spanish considered 'unhealthy', a decline in ships arriving from Spain, and pirate attacks. The other reason for the Spanish reoccupation of Trujillo was to have a base in order to dislodge the British from the Mosquito Coast. This topic will be dealt with below. Although never fully abandoned by people, official Spanish presence ended in 1683. Mack, "Contraband Trade Through Trujillo" and Linda Newson, *Cost of Conquest: Indian Decline in Honduras under Spanish Rule*, (Boulder: Westview Press: 1986)

<sup>160</sup> The British subjects living in Central America were usually known as Shoremen (as in the Mosquito Shore) or Baymen (as in Bay of Honduras).

<sup>161</sup> Troy S. Floyd, *The Anglo-Spanish Struggle for Mosquitia*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press: 1967), p. 107; and G. Earl Sanders, "Counter-Contraband in Spanish America: Handicaps of the Governors in the Indies", *The Americas*, 34:1, (1977) p. 67

wrote to the Captain-General of Guatemala in August of 1784 to complain that local *justicias*, much like teniente Andurain, “protected and harbored the smugglers.”<sup>162</sup>

Moreover, the local population’s involvement in the contraband trade was well known to Spain’s enemies—especially the British. A newspaper article from the *Jamaican Gazette* written earlier in 1785 noted that “the Spanish continue to trade with the inhabitants of the Bay of Honduras, the main site of British settlements. The newspaper had a number of advertisements selling products acquired from Central America, such as lumber and sarsaparilla, evidence that regular, sustained trade took place between the two populations.”<sup>163</sup>

The reports about locals engaging in illegal activities mirror the findings of earlier ones. In 1743, the Royal Engineer Díaz Navarro, who was surveying the Honduran coast for a suitable harbor, reported that the town of San Jorge de Olanchito, near Trujillo, was composed of “mulattos and negros... cowards without honor, attracted to all evil; they are the biggest smugglers in the entire province and very disobedient towards the law.” He went on to say that of the few *españoles* that live there, most were also traffickers of illicit commerce.<sup>164</sup> Ultimately, Navarro suggested that the plan to reoccupy Trujillo be abandoned in favor of a site further up the coast, at Omoa. Eventually, Spain would invest over a million pesos in developing a fort at Omoa and—against Navarro's wishes—would also reestablish a Spanish presence at Trujillo.

Hervais and his men faced the added difficulty of trying to stem a trade that had

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<sup>162</sup> AGI, Guatemala, 413, folio 5.

<sup>163</sup> This report was known to Spanish officials. After capturing a British merchant vessel in the waters off of Cartagena, the Captain-General of Santa Fé found a copy of the *Jamaican Gazette* (called the *Gazeta de Jamayca* by Spanish officials) in the ship and forwarded the contents to officials in Guatemala. *Ibid.*, folio 22-23.

<sup>164</sup> See Manuel Rubio Sánchez, *Historia del Puerto de Trujillo*, tomo II, (Banco Central de Honduras, Tegucigalpa) p. 251

grown in volume since the late seventeenth century. While it is impossible to quantify how much illegal trade came into and out of the Audiencia of Guatemala, authorities in Central America, royal officials in Spain, and British merchants based in Jamaica believed that the amount (in both total goods and in value) had grown significantly during the eighteenth century.<sup>165</sup> Much of this trade flowed out of the region through eastern Honduras and Nicaragua to British settlements along the eastern coast of Central America. From there, merchants sent the goods to Jamaica, British North America, or Europe. These groups traded a wide variety of items, many of which were difficult or impossible for Spanish subjects living in Central America to legally obtain. Just as important, as the global economy expanded during the eighteenth century—particularly in northern Europe—European merchants could offer a premium price for Central American trade goods, (e.g. cacao, indigo, hides, silver, and cattle) often paying more than the Spanish merchants in Guatemala or Veracruz were willing to pay. For example, during the 1770s and 1780s, indigo planters in El Salvador frequently complained to royal officials that Guatemalan merchants (who were also the planters' creditors) did not pay them fair prices. Many took to selling at least some of their indigo to the British traders along the eastern coasts in order to earn a profit.<sup>166</sup>

Finally, in addition to a greater total amount of illegal trade being smuggled to and from British settlements, Hervais and his men had to contend with new types of

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<sup>165</sup> This also coincides with the expansion of international shipping. For example in 1702, the British had around 3,300 boats of all sizes. In 1764, the number of boats had risen to 8100. Héctor R. Feliciano Ramos, *El contrabando inglés en el Caribe y el Golfo de México, 1748-1778*, (Seville: Diputación Provincial de Sevilla, 1990) p. 26.

<sup>166</sup> See Troy Floyd, "Guatemalan Merchants, the Government, and the Provincianos, 1750-1800," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 41, No. 1, 1961, pp. 92-93.

illegal trade. Though evading taxes, trading with foreign merchants, and selling stolen goods remained a major source of illegal trade, new royal monopolies on everyday items, such as tobacco and alcohol, became another area of the economy that illegal traders tried to exploit. The royal monopolies on previously legal goods fueled the growth of illegal trade *within* the region during the eighteenth century and due to its pervasiveness, posed a significant obstacle for individuals tasked with eliminating illegal trade, such as Hervais.

The challenges that Hervais faced, namely the active participation of local officials and subjects, the isolated nature of eastern Central America, and the proximity of British settlements highlight some of the problems that Spanish officials faced in their attempts to intercept and disrupt contraband activities in Central America. Significantly, the challenges of controlling trade and collecting taxes within the region became even more complex during the Bourbon period. The mid-eighteenth century saw sweeping economic reforms undertaken in the Audiencia of Guatemala and throughout the Spanish empire. Reform-minded officials hoped that these measures would generate more income for the Crown, secure the empire from other European nations, and spur the Spanish economy. The economic reforms followed one of three paths: overhauling regulations for trade, more efficiently collecting taxes, and the creation of new royal monopolies. Over the eighteenth century, the Spanish Crown did away with the cumbersome *flota* system and introduced direct shipping from Spain to major ports in the Americas. In 1787 the royal government went one step further and began the “free port” system that allowed ports in the Spanish colonies to trade with one another instead of having to ship their merchandise to Cadiz and then back to the other side of the Atlantic. New taxes and custom duties were levied. The Crown also began to directly hire tax collectors instead of

relying on tax-farming. New political jurisdictions were created with the hope that the increased number of officials would do a better job of collecting taxes from outlying regions. Finally, royal monopolies, such as the monopolies that controlled tobacco and alcohol, were also created to provide new revenue streams.

The Spanish reforms were designed to centralize political authority, steady the defenses of the empire, and increase remittances mirror the actions undertaken by other European powers of the eighteenth century. Although some of these ideas began at the end of the seventeenth century, the world-wide conflict during the Seven Years War (1756-1763) underscored the need for large national armies and imperial defenses along with an increased budget to fund these ventures. The British in North America launched similar revenue-gathering techniques, most notably the Sugar Act of 1763 and the Stamp Act of 1765.<sup>167</sup> The Portuguese also undertook imperial reforms under the direction of Marquess of Pombal, who as Minister of the Kingdom (1750-1777), redesigned the economic and political structure of Portugal and its colonies.<sup>168</sup> Greater enforcement of the new and existing regulations, including the stationing of more troops and more direct political control of the colonies, also accompanied these measures throughout the Atlantic world.

While the changes introduced by European colonial powers allowed for more wealth to be collected and ultimately sent back to Europe, these reforms also elicited responses by local populations. One of the most wide-spread reactions to these measures was to participate in illegal trade, which tried to escape the added costs mandated by

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<sup>167</sup> J. H. Elliot offers an Atlantic World perspective on the Stamp and Sugar acts in *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>168</sup> Kenneth Maxwell, *Pombal: Paradox of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

European monarchs. In Spanish America, individuals, families, towns, and entire regions found that the new taxes and improved tax collection methods could be bypassed as agents of the Crown could be bought off or avoided, foreign goods could be smuggled in—for even greater profits—and the royal monopolies proved themselves to be incapable of satisfying local demands for high-quality, cheap, and readily accessible tobacco and alcohol. Spanish trade policies and wars with European rivals also created economic and strategic incentives for Spanish subjects and merchants from other nations to engage in clandestine commerce. Periods of conflict between Spain and other nations made enforcement of trade regulations difficult, especially when the British effectively blocked legal Spanish shipping during times of war.<sup>169</sup>

Furthermore, the establishment of new royal monopolies on goods (such as tobacco) that were widely produced by large numbers of the population for household consumption and local markets had a hand in eroding Spanish authority and pushed some individuals to participate in illicit trade. At a time when the tax burden of Spanish subjects increased dramatically, the royal government placed even greater restrictions on economic activity, thus limiting the number of ways in which residents of Central America could pay their taxes. To enforce the existing and new economic regulations—and to deal with rising illegal trade, the royal government began to rely increasingly upon armed officials to enforce the law. Armed monopoly guards, tax officials, and greater numbers of soldiers and ships were employed in policing the cities, countryside, and waters of Central America for illegal economic activities. And yet, despite the increased vigilance, illegal trade remained a problem.

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<sup>169</sup> Some historians, such as Jeremy Adelman, have argued that over the course of the wars of the French Revolution, especially after 1796, Spanish control over its trade rapidly diminished. See Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

Paradoxically, the continued importance of illicit commerce helped Spain maintain its control of the Americas. In many ways, the economic and social health of Spain's imperial project continued to require *some* illegal trade to function.<sup>170</sup> Illegal trade helped indigenous groups to pay tribute, allowed wealth to circulate in the region, provided a means for underpaid royal officials to pay off their debts, and was often the only way that needed goods could be acquired—especially during times of war. Finally, Spanish officials had to balance their desires to collect revenues with the costs of enforcement. Each additional person hired to oversee the monopolies and root out contraband traders; each fort, watchtower, or monopoly building constructed diverted money that otherwise would have been used for other things or remitted to Spain. Spanish officials ultimately realized that total enforcement of economic regulations would cost too much money, forcing them to prioritize how to spend their limited funds. For marginal areas like Central America, this led to limited enforcement. All of these factors contributed to making Central America a hub for illicit commerce.

When authorities in Spanish America charged someone with engaging in contraband or evading customs duties by either catching them in the act or through a denunciation, an official investigation began. Ideally, depending on the type and severity of the crime, an inventory of the goods in question would be accounted for, testimonies taken, arguments made, and a judgment rendered. If the authorities convicted someone, the goods would then be sold off at auction and fines and back taxes paid, with the rest of the proceeds used to cover the court costs, paid to officials in charge of combating illegal trade, and as a 'reward' for the person who came forth with information about the illegal

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<sup>170</sup> This idea will be expanded upon in greater detail below.

activities.<sup>171</sup> Along with fines and imprisonment, military service and labor drafts were also forms of punishment. If the defendant was found innocent, then the goods would be returned.<sup>172</sup> In practice, the process of charging and convicting someone of illegal trade, as well as to sell off the goods in question, was a long, drawn out affair. Individual cases could take five years to sort out—even longer if it was appealed to officials in mainland Spain. Judgments could be overturned by higher courts and witnesses and the accused could die while the status of their property remained unresolved. Additionally, the sworn testimonies of the accused and witnesses (especially if they were poor, Indian, slave, or mulatto) could be subject to intimidation, threats, coercion, and long terms of confinement, producing a legal record that might not match reality. Moreover, most of the testimonies given often fell into the categories of rumor and second-hand knowledge.

There also exists a danger in creating a skewed vision of what illicit trade was and who participated in it, because not all crimes were prosecuted. For example, while there are documents attesting that Cayetano Noguera, the *alcalde ordinario* of Rivas illegally sold tobacco in 1767, the documentation does not mention where he got the tobacco or to whom he sold it to. This type of selective prosecution was the norm for investigations into illegal trade during the colonial period. Surely there were other smugglers or corrupt office-holders living in Rivas at the same that successfully avoided suspicion or had well-placed friends and remained out of the official records.<sup>173</sup> The uneven enforcement of

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<sup>171</sup> The reward could be worth as much as 1/3 the total value of the contraband materials. It could go to the person who denounced the crime or it could be given to the arresting authorities as an incentive to uncover illegal trade.

<sup>172</sup> A summary of the procedures for investigating and/or detaining ship-born contraband are laid out in Héctor R. Feliciano Ramos, *El contrabando inglés en el Caribe y el Golfo de México: 1748-1778*, (Seville: 1990), pp. 278-279.

<sup>173</sup> AGI, Guatemala, 412, No. 6, “Don Cayetano Noguera, Alcalde Ordinario de primer voto de Rivas de Nicaragua por haber contravenido a las ordenanzas de dicho Real Estanco”.

economic regulations—especially of the rich and powerful—makes it somewhat difficult to reconstruct the networks of illegal trade that connected Central American rural areas, towns, and cities with other parts of the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Europe. At best, scholars can tangentially link individuals investigated or arrested for illegal trade with high-level government officials and members of the colonial aristocracy. For example, the richest man in Central America during the eighteenth century, the Guatemalan merchant Juan Fermín de Aycinena, had considerable ties to illegal trade via the commercial agents he employed. It was well-known that Aycinena's large network of commercial agents throughout the isthmus, Mexico, and Europe frequently sold items that had been acquired through extralegal means.<sup>174</sup> However, many of Aycinena's agents also occupied positions of prominence within the government, such as being governors, priests, alcaldes, and corregidores. The commercial agents used their powers to promote their own and Aycinena's enrichment while discouraging official investigations into their business activities.<sup>175</sup> One such tie was with José Antonio Vargas, the *capitán de conquista* (a regional military commander) who operated near the eastern Nicaraguan frontier. A merchant from Granada, Miguel de Villanueva Martínez, complained that Vargas illegally traded with the English and their Moskito allies. A lengthy investigation

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<sup>174</sup> Aycinena himself was charged with evading taxes on imported goods in 1783. See Gustavo Palma Murga, “Between Fidelity and Pragmatism: Guatemala's Commercial Elite Responds to Bourbon Reforms on Trade and Contraband” in Dym and Belaubre (eds. ), *Politics, Economy, and Society in Bourbon Central America*, p. 110

<sup>175</sup> Richmond F. Brown, *Juan Fermín de Aycinena: Central American Colonial Entrepreneur, 1729-1796* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997). Brown also lists an inventory of the most common goods that Aycinea's merchant empire traded in: Thread, buttons, twine, ribbons, braids, tapestries, and chintz. Sombreros of all qualities, other types of hats, shoes, petticoats, reams of paper, cinnamon, floor cloth, bedspreads, *huipiles*, stirrups,... textiles: Italian velvets, taffeta from France and Spain, fine linen from Brittany, English flannel, Chinese silks, damasks from China and Valencia, Belgian lace, English serge, cottons from Rouen, indian, and china and cheesecloth. p. 78.

followed based on Villanueva's reports, but the authorities decided not to charge Vargas—much less Aycinena—with any crime.<sup>176</sup> This case, and others like it, can have multiple interpretations that historians must consider, even if evidence is lacking. For example, does the formal commercial relationship between Aycinena and Vargas mean that Aycinena knew of Vargas' supposedly illegal activities? Was Villanueva's case against Vargas motivated by his own commercial enterprise? Did Vargas and/or Aycinena avoid punishment because of their political and economic positions?

Further complicating studies of illicit trade is the lack of a clear definition of what constitutes illegal trade. For many scholars of the period, illegal trade has consisted solely of direct trade with foreign agents.<sup>177</sup> However, in surveying archival records for the late colonial period it is clear that many other types of illicit trade existed beyond the narrow definition examined by most historians. For the purposes of this chapter, I define 'illegal trade' broadly to include any economic activity that was prohibited by the government, including the purposeful evasion of compulsory taxation. Using this definition, it is possible to identify four different types of illegal trade that occurred during the colonial period: tax evasion, trade in restricted goods, direct trade with foreigners, and the sale of

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<sup>176</sup> Documents from this case eventually produced an *expediente* that had more than 1400 pages in it. This case, along with Varga's role along the frontier, will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. AGI, Guatemala,856, "Expediente de José Antonio de Vargas comercio ilicito" 1771.

<sup>177</sup> To be fair, many of these authors limit themselves to studying 'contraband' or 'smuggling' and not the much larger category of illegal trade. Nonetheless, even these studies are usually focused on the direct foreign trade. Spanish officials though, used the word *contrabando* to denote *any* sort of merchandise that was illegally obtained, from foreigners or from residents of Spanish America. The Consulado de Comercio in Guatemala City also had a very broad definition of contraband. Palma Murga argues that their broad definition was meant to retain the Consulado's grip on legitimate trade in the region and diminish the credibility of merchants located in the provincial towns of the Audiencia of Guatemala. Palma Murga, "Between Fidelity and Pragmatism", especially pp. 104-109 in Dym, *Politics, Economy, and Society*.

stolen goods.<sup>178</sup> This multifaceted definition allows for a more complete understanding of colonial society and better contextualizes Spain's continuous efforts to stop all forms of illegal trade, including forms of economic activity that it deemed as damaging for Spanish industries, counter-productive to royal economic or political goals, or otherwise avoiding payment on taxes due to the king.

The first type of illegal trade, tax evasion, involved the transportation of goods for sale from one area to another without paying taxes, which included customs duties levied when merchants moved goods from one jurisdiction to another, skipping out on paying the *alcabala* (a type of sales tax), or not declaring the value of all goods on-board when a ship entered or left port. Consider the case of Antonio de la Fuente, a merchant from Cartago. In 1767, de la Fuente was caught along the royal highway near León with ten trunks full of merchandise, including seven yards of purple fabric, twenty-four pieces of silk, eight yards of cheesecloth, and seventy-five pounds of purple thread. While possession of these items was not illegal, de la Fuente had failed to pay the *alcabala* tax on them, most recently when he left Masaya. When de la Fuente complained that he didn't know that he had to pay the tax, the treasury officials in charge of the case told him that ignorance of the law (especially for a self-proclaimed merchant) was not a viable excuse. The customs officials forced De la Fuente to pay the owed taxes as well as a

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<sup>178</sup> That is to say that many of the examples given could be placed into more than one category. For example, individuals trading with British merchants not only broke the provisions against trade with foreigners, but also avoided paying the proper taxes on the goods exchanged. I have also left out, perhaps arbitrarily, instances of fraud, abuse of political power, and illegal trading with Indian communities. Abuse committed by officeholders who hold authority over Indians, such as unfairly forcing them into the *repartimiento* system, using their labor for economic gain, and Spanish merchants selling goods in Indian towns will be examined in chapter 3.

small fine.<sup>179</sup>

A second type of illegal trade was the production or trade in illegal or government-regulated goods.<sup>180</sup> Most commonly, this involved the cultivation or production of items monopolized by the royal government, such as tobacco and alcohol. Although the monopolies proved lucrative for the royal treasury, issues regarding quality, price, and availability of monopoly products fostered a large black market for illegally produced goods. For instance, when tobacco officials learned that Juan Pascual de los Reyes, an Indian resident of Subtiava clandestinely sold cigarettes and other tobacco goods from an unnamed source, they raided his house in October of 1767. While they were unable to find Pascual, they did recover ten bundles of tobacco and a device to roll cigarettes. In addition, the tobacco officials detained his wife, Juana Delgado, who told them that her husband would travel the two days it took to reach the town of Somoto, buy the illegally farmed tobacco, and then return to Subtiava to manufacture and sell cigarettes at prices lower than the tobacco monopoly.<sup>181</sup>

The third, and perhaps best studied, category of illicit trade that occurred in colonial Spanish America were commercial exchanges between Spanish subjects and foreign merchants that were not authorized by government officials. In the Audiencia of Guatemala, these transactions mainly occurred along the Caribbean coast, either directly

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<sup>179</sup> AGI Guatemala,459.

<sup>180</sup> A detailed discussion of the creation and operation of royal monopolies, especially of the tobacco monopoly, is found below.

<sup>181</sup> *Manojos* (bundles of tobacco), were typically made from four 'hands' or *gavillas* of tobacco. The total amount per hand would vary depending on the type and quality of tobacco used. See Charlotte Cosner, "Rich and Poor, White and Black, Slave and Free: The Social History of Cuba's Tobacco Farmers, 1763-1817" Unpublished PhD dissertation, (Miami: Florida International University, 2008), p. 25. AM, Caja 10, Numero 10, "Denuncia contra [...] nombrado Pasqual por estar bendiendo tabaco"

with foreign merchants, or through Indian intermediaries.<sup>182</sup> A good, albeit atypical, example of this type of contraband activity can be found in the allegations made against the Corregidor of Matagalpa, Matias de Oropesa, in 1757. Various testimonies, including from a merchant of Granada, a priest, and the military commander of the eastern Nicaragua, reported that Oropesa had a large, sophisticated smuggling network that brought goods in from the coast up the Mico River. Apparently, Oropesa had hired a Carib Indian named Bartolo to trade with various foreign merchants every fifteen days at a secret spot along the river. Bartolo traded silver, cacao, tobacco, and other goods for things that ranged from European felt and gunpowder to even hats made from Vicuña wool. It was alleged that most of these goods would be stockpiled in secret locations throughout Nicaragua and slowly sold through intermediaries in villages and in larger towns like Granada.<sup>183</sup> The priest, Cacimico de Zapeda who administered the villages around Teustepe (now called Boaco), testified that Oropesa frequently engaged in large quantities of illicit trade, bringing with him 6,000 to 8,000 pesos when he went to the coast. Although the documentation about the case against Oropesa ends abruptly, it is likely that this type of complex merchant network existed elsewhere too.<sup>184</sup> The large and

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<sup>182</sup> Frank Griffith Dawson found that Spanish merchants traveling to British settlements at Black River on the Caribbean coast had to pay twenty cattle every year to the local Mosquito chief just for the privilege of passing through their territory. See, Frank Griffith Dawson, "William Pitt's Settlement at Black River on the Mosquito Shore: A Challenge to Spain in Central America, 1732-87" *Hispanic American Historical Review* 63:4 (1983), pp. 677-706; The price of admission is also mentioned in Vera Lee Brown, "Anglo-Spanish Relations in America in the Closing Years of the Colonial Era," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 5:3 (1922), pp. 327-483.

<sup>183</sup> See also Tomás Ayón, *Historia de Nicaragua, Tomo III*, pp. 17-18. Ayón gives the names of the British traders at the Laguna de las Perlas, where the Río Grande de Matagalpa flows into the sea, as "Maestre Ebran, Captain Thomas, and Luis Salas [a native of the Canary Islands]."

<sup>184</sup> AGCA, A3.6 (5) Exp. 3621 Leg. 478, "Autos contra el corregidor de Matagalpa Don Matias de Oropesa por comercio ilícito con los ingleses". The informants had very specific information about the workings of the network, including the average cost of transporting goods from the coast to the population centers

bulky consumer goods that Central Americans craved needed a network of people and animals to transport the goods from foreign sources to local residents.

The fourth and final category under consideration involves the sale of stolen property. In colonial Central America, the type of theft that attracted the most investigations by local and royal authorities was the theft of animals—namely cattle, horses, and mules. Easily stolen from the large semi-feral herds that populated the central and eastern portions of Nicaragua (especially near Chontales) and Honduras (namely the provinces of Olancho) this type of theft could be lucrative.<sup>185</sup> Beyond their functions as sources of food, clothing, and draft power, these animals represented a mobile and highly concentrated form of wealth that proved to be a favorite target for bandits and thieves.<sup>186</sup> Although not traditionally associated with other forms of illegal trade, such as smuggling, the existence of a market for stolen goods created several problems for Spanish authorities. Theft caused not only a financial loss for the individual whose property was stolen but it also denied the Crown tax revenues. Moreover, the market for stolen goods could also circumvent other regulations placed on legitimate commerce, such as price controls or prohibitions of selling certain goods outside of particular times or markets. One such prohibition was the ban on selling cattle destined for Guatemala City outside of

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of Nicaragua (nine pesos, one real). To facilitate the trade, Oropesa had stockpiled 20 *tercios* [each *tercio* weighed about 170 pounds] of tobacco to use as a means of exchange with foreigner traders.

<sup>185</sup> Most ranchers took precautions against the theft of their animals by branding them. Many of the larger ranchers submitted to authorities descriptions and drawings of their brands.

<sup>186</sup> Animals in pre-industrial societies are often seen as mobile forms of capital. See Robert W. Slenes, “Os múltiplos dos porcos e diamantes: A economia escravista de Minas Gerais no século XIX.” *Estudos econômicos* 18:3 (September-December, 1988): 449-495.

the annual cattle fair at Laguna de Cerro Redondo in Guatemala.<sup>187</sup> A good example of theft as a type of illegal trade is the 1768 case brought against Leónardo Ruiz, who authorities charged with a number of robberies, including the theft of cattle, cows, mules, horses, and a number of household items. A number of witnesses testified that Ruiz, a twenty-seven year old Indian from the town of San Pedro Metapa, entered their houses at night, taking valuable items, and then fled the area. On one occasion, he climbed into the house of José Martínez and stole a few items of clothing and a string of pearls, and then left with a stolen horse. Ruiz was also proficient at cattle rustling. When Ruiz acquired cattle, he often took them to his brother Bernardo's house to butcher them and sell the salted meat and hides. When Bernardo told Reymundo Chávez, also of Metapa, that his brother was butchering a cow, Chávez went to investigate. When he entered Bernardo's house Chávez found items that he was missing along with those belonging to Martínez.<sup>188</sup> Spanish authorities charged Ruiz with multiple thefts and as punishment, Ruiz was sent to garrison a Spanish fortress at an undisclosed location.<sup>189</sup>

Traditionally, scholars have approached the study of illegal trade in colonial Spanish America either obliquely—through studies focusing on colorful characters linked one way or another to illegal trade—or under very specific conditions. The exploits of charismatic figures of illegal trade have long attracted scholarly attention. Since many of

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<sup>187</sup> Cattlemen also illegally sold off their herd for better prices (thus ignoring the official price controls instituted by the Guatemalan authorities) as they drove their cattle from as far away as Nicoya and Chontales. See Floyd, “Guatemalan merchants versus Provincianos”, pp.100-101.

<sup>188</sup> AM, Caja 9, No. 9, “Causa criminal seguida de oficio por el alcalde de pardos de el Pueblo de San Pedro Metapa contra Leónardo Ruiz, indio, por varios robos que ha hecho en diferentes partes, de ganados, vacunos, mulares, y caballares.” Over the course of the trial, several other people came forward with claims that Ruiz stole from them. Other items listed as stolen include: two hats, 12 reales worth of cacao, mules, horses, and cattle.

<sup>189</sup> It is possible that Ruiz was sent to El Castillo de la Inmaculada Concepción, along the San Juan River, as the documentation mentions that he was sent to *'el castillo'*.

the most well-known pirates (such as Henry Morgan, Alexander Exquemelin, Francis Drake, John Hawkins, William Dampier, Basil Ringrose, Raveneau de Lussan, and Lionel Wafer) also left autobiographical accounts of their lives as smugglers, many historians have used them and other sources to reconstruct their individual lives.<sup>190</sup> Several authors note that many of these famous or otherwise notorious individuals operated in the murky area between legality and illegality that depended on context. For example, Henry Morgan raided (and traded with) Central American towns and ports with the blessing of the English government, yet was considered by the Spanish Crown to be operating outside the law. Most recently, Kris Lane has chosen to move away from the romantic notions of piracy's legacy and instead argued that much of the piracy and illegal trade that occurred in the New World was mainly fueled by military and political events taking place in Europe—not for riches or glory.<sup>191</sup> By the beginning of the eighteenth century, though, piracy's effects on Spanish America had been greatly reduced by treaties and through a shift to the less violent (though still illegal) smuggling.

Another important consideration for the study of illegal trade is the connection that merchants, government officials, and leading families of Spanish America had with illegal trade. In his study on the cochineal trade in southern Mexico, Brian Hamnett argued that merchants in Oaxaca relied—at least partially—on the importation of smuggled goods, such as textiles, and diverted at least some of their dyes through illegal channels, usually to avoid taxes or to get a better price.<sup>192</sup> Macarena Perusset, in her book on contraband in early colonial Argentina, found that many of the most prominent

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<sup>190</sup> See, Peter R. Galvin, *Patterns of Pillage* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000) and Marcus Rediker, *Villain of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (New York: Beacon Press, 2005).

<sup>191</sup> Kris Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas, 1500-1750* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1998).

<sup>192</sup> Brian Hamnett, *Politics and Trade in Southern Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

families of Buenos Aires got their start with money made from smuggling goods into the region. Later these same families used their wealth to purchase positions within the colonial administration of the province which allowed them to further consolidate their wealth and improve their social status.<sup>193</sup> Perusset's assertions about the merchant elite of Buenos Aires follow a similar pattern to other areas of the Spanish world. Historians examining the great merchant houses of Cadíz, Lima, and Mexico City have uncovered tenuous (though significant) evidence of their connections to illegal trade.<sup>194</sup>

There have also been major attempts to evaluate and estimate the amount of illegal trade that occurred in Spanish America. The majority of the attention has been given to direct foreign trade, usually referred to as smuggling or the contraband trade, with most of the English and Spanish language studies focused on the trade coming in to and out of Jamaica, most of which went to Cuba and some to northern South America. Studies of this type attempt to explain both the reasons behind the success of illegal trade as well as documenting and estimating the total amount of illegal trade. Due to the incomplete nature of data surrounding smuggling, any estimate of the illicit economy involves the use of primary sources, contemporary accounts, and specific formulas to come up with a quantitative measure.<sup>195</sup> This effort has resulted in several educated guesses of the total amounts of illegal trade that occurred (see Table 2.1) for different areas of the Spanish empire and during different periods.

**Table 2.1**

Year	Area of Contraband	Value	Goods	Source	Notes
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<sup>193</sup> Macarena Perusset, *Contrabando y sociedad en el Río de la plata colonial* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Dunken, 2006).

<sup>194</sup> John R. Fisher, *Bourbon Peru: 1750-1824* (Liverpool University Press, 2009).

<sup>195</sup> They rarely take into account revenue lost from tax evasion. In my view, this scholarship is analogous to demographic studies of indigenous groups in the Americas prior to and after contact with Europeans.

	Considered	Estimated	Smuggled		
Turn of the 18 <sup>th</sup> Century	British Trade with Spanish America (direct and via re-export)	500,000 pounds		Pearce, (Book) pg. 240.	
1703	Peruvian Silver Smugglers to English, in Costa Rica.	349,000 untaxed pesos	Silver	Wortman, <i>Spanish Society</i>	p. 99
1713-1739	British Trade to Spanish America	At least 300,000 a year		Pearce (book)	Most from the <i>asiento</i> trade
1739-1763	British Trade to Spanish America	Around 200,000 a year		Ibid.	
Early 1760s	All British Trade with Spanish America	1,300,000 pounds		Ibid.	
1750s	Bay of Honduras	160,000 Pounds	Logwood	Naylor (1989)	
1761	English Contraband Trade in all of Spanish America	6 Million Pesos/Year		Christelow (1942)	
1775-1799	Aud. Of Guatemala	NA	100,000 lbs of Salvadoran Indigo a year	Floyd, (1961A)	
1792-1795	British West Indies trade with Spanish America	700,000-1,400,000 Pounds 1,726,119 Pounds*		Adrian Pearce (2001)	This number is just the amount officially registered by British merchants, it was probably higher.
1817	Illegal Trade between Central America and Jamaica	250 Million Pesetas		Rafael Ieiva Vivas (1879)	

Beyond trying to estimate the amount of trade or analyzing individual activities of pirates and other illegal traders, historians have also examined the fundamentals of the trade itself, such as where the main areas of clandestine trade were and what goods merchants traded. Héctor R. Reliciano Ramos and Peter Galvin, for example, have analyzed the shipping manifests, *guardacosta* reports, geographic features, and wind patterns to reconstruct the main shipping corridors of illicit trade and piracy in the

Caribbean Basin.<sup>196</sup> Galvin notes that certain areas of the Caribbean proved to be convenient bases for piracy and illegal trade, especially the islands of Tortuga and Jamaica, because the prevailing winds made shipment to and from Spanish America easy. Throughout the colonial period, silver remained the item that was most sought after by foreign smugglers, though other items, such as dyes, wood, medicinal plants, livestock, hides, and foodstuffs proved to be profitable enough for foreign merchants. Spanish merchants traded these goods for a variety of European manufactures, mainly textiles and manufactured tools. Sometimes though, illegal traders brought into Spanish America rare or hard-to-find items. For example, in 1750 Spanish guardacosta forces captured an English ship off cape Gracias a Dios that had sailed from Jamaica and contained chinaware, paintings, and books (including grammar manuals, histories of the lives of saints, and, ironically, a copy of the *Recopilación de las Leyes de los Reynos de Indias*, which served as the main legal code for Spanish America during the colonial period).<sup>197</sup>

Historians have been especially concerned with what effect the illegal trade had on the overall health of the Spanish empire. A common theme with much of the literature surrounding the topic of illegal trade in Spanish America is that European intervention in the form of smuggling and piracy at first stunted, and then later contributed to the demise of the Spanish colonial project. For instance, Kenneth R. Andrews argues that non-Spanish Europeans developed a 'parasitic' relationship with the Spanish Caribbean

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<sup>196</sup> *El contrabando ingles en el Caribe y el Golfo de Mexico*. Peter Galvin, *Patterns of Pillage: A Geography of Piracy in Caribbean, 1713*

<sup>197</sup> AGCA, A3.6 (5) Exp. 3614, Leg. 476, “Don Domingo de Arana y Salazar, tesorero de la caja de la provincia de Nicaragua pide la promulgacion de medias para contrarrestar el comercio ilicito”. The items were registered to a Ignacio Bettetta, a vecino from Guatemala.

colonies, raiding and trading with them from the 1530s onward.<sup>198</sup> Others, such as Paul Hoffman, describe Spain's efforts to protect and provide trade goods for *all* of its territories as futile in the face of intense competition from other European merchants.<sup>199</sup> The widespread nature of smuggling in both Spain and its colonies is a major theme in Stanley and Barbára Stein's work. They note that Spanish economic underdevelopment in the Iberian Peninsula fueled illegal trade in the colonies and represented a systemic challenge to the Hapsburg and Bourbon monarchies. The inability of Spain to produce manufactured goods for export to its colonies allowed other European powers to step in and profit handsomely. Ultimately, the Steins argue, the Spanish monarchs were unable or unwilling to undertake the significant economic and political changes needed to address the problems.<sup>200</sup> Jeremy Adelman makes the case that the pervasiveness of smuggling, corruption, and a lack of stable clientelistic relationships in the late-colonial period helped push many, especially creole merchants, to join up with independence forces. Adelman argues that initially, most creoles simply wanted a renewal of traditional relationships, including trading relationships, not a complete restructuring of society.<sup>201</sup>

On the other hand, some historians believe that foreign smuggling's affects in the Spanish empire should be considered more benign and could even be considered

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<sup>198</sup> Andrews is careful to note that natural, economic, and political factors greatly shaped the way the Spanish settled the Caribbean. Kenneth R. Andrews, *Spanish Caribbean: Trade and Plunder* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

<sup>199</sup> Paul Hoffman, *The Spanish Crown and the Defense of the Caribbean, 1535-1585: Precedent, Patrimonialism, and Royal Parsimony* (Baton Rouge: 1980). Sergio Villalobos, *El comercio y la crisis colonial*, Ed.Universidad de Chile, 1968

<sup>200</sup> The argument is best presented in Stanley and Barbara Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War: Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) and their *Apogee of Empire: Spain and New Spain in the Age of Charles III, 1759-1789* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

<sup>201</sup> Jeremy Adelman, "Commerce and Corruption in the late Spanish and Portuguese Empires" in Emmanuel Kreike and William Chester Jordan, eds., *Corrupt Histories* (Rochester: University of Rochester, 2004)

beneficial to multiple parties including, paradoxically, the long-term survival of Spain's colonial project.<sup>202</sup> Even the expedition of Alexander von Humboldt found evidence that smuggling stimulated local economies. He noted that Dutch and English smugglers operating along the northern coast of South America stimulated the local cacao industry by providing a new market that paid higher prices for their goods. This in turn allowed cacao production to expand and produced an economic benefit to other areas of the economy.<sup>203</sup> Writing in the late nineteenth century, José Julian Acosta Y Calvo examined reports from both sides of the Spanish Atlantic and noted that some officials found that trade with foreign sources to be useful in certain, localized instances, such as in Puerto Rico.<sup>204</sup> Earl G. Sanders, in addressing the many problems that Spanish officials in Venezuela faced in containing the contraband trade, acknowledged that Spanish colonists largely benefited from smuggling. The contraband trade brought in much-desired manufactured goods and spurred the local export economy, though this came at the expense of the monopoly traders in Cadiz and Cartagena. He also writes that when Bourbon reformers tried to address some of the problems associated with the legal trade (namely high prices, low-quality goods, and scarcity), they faced the added difficulty of a pervasive, entrenched system of corruption throughout society that thwarted economic

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<sup>202</sup> Kenneth J. Andrien, writing about corruption within the empire asserted “If corruption [or illegal trade] remained at reasonable levels, it could play a positive role in binding the interests of the Crown, the bureaucracy, and local elites into a workable imperial system.” In, “Corruption, Inefficiency, and Imperial Decline in the Seventeenth-Century Viceroyalty of Peru”, *The Americas*, Vol 41, No. 1 (1984),p.11.

<sup>203</sup> Alexander von Humboldt, Helen Maria Williams, trans. *Personal Narrative of the Travels to the Equinocial Regions of the New Continent, During the Years 1799-1804, Vol. 4.* (AMC Press: New York, 1996) p. 248. Though not the principle aim of his expedition, Humboldt routinely tried to find exact amounts of goods produced in the various regions he traveled to, including the amounts smuggled out of the area. See, for example, his figures on cacao, *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 201.

<sup>204</sup> José Julian Acosta Y Calvo, *El sistema prohibitive y la libertad de comercio en América*, p. 13. For example, he quotes Don Alejandro de O'Reilly's memoria written in Puerto Rico in 1765.

and political reforms and allowed contraband goods to remain a popular option.<sup>205</sup> Sergio Villalobos argues in his study on late-colonial Chile that foreign smuggling, first from the French and then from other European powers, buoyed the Chilean economy early in the eighteenth century in a way that legitimate trade could not and fostered links between Chile and other parts of the world, including such far-away places as Sweden.<sup>206</sup> Likewise, Barbára Potthast-Jukeit argues that Central American smuggling grew in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries largely due to commodity shortages among residents of Central America. She suggests that smuggling on the eastern coast was a logical outcome that was not so much about violating imperial laws or endangering Spanish sovereignty as it was to satiate demands for European goods. In one instance she documents how British and Spanish residents of the area worked together to build a road from Black River to towns in the interior in 1741, linking the area to the Atlantic economy.<sup>207</sup> More broadly, Linda Rupert has also found strong evidence of social and cultural connections that began (and then were maintained) by “inter-imperial trade”.<sup>208</sup>

Scholars such as Alan Karras have found the study of smuggling to be particularly informative for questions related to state formation and as a means to uncover the 'lived lives' of individuals and societies. However, instead of actively subverting state authority like bandits, pirates, and rebels, the illegal economic practices of smugglers *require* the presence of the state in order for them to carry out their line of work. Illicit traders' main advantage is that they can position themselves to offer goods at a lower price if items are

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<sup>205</sup> G. Earl Sanders, “Counter-Contraband in Spanish America” *The Americas*

<sup>206</sup> Sergio Villalobos, *El comercio y la crisis colonial: un mito de independencia* (Santiago de Chile: Universidad de Chile, 1968).

<sup>207</sup> Barbára Potthast-Jukeit “Centroamerica y el contrabando por la costa de Mosquitos en el siglo XVIII” *Mesoamerica*, 19:36 (1998) p. 505

<sup>208</sup> Linda M. Rupert, “Marronage, Manumission and Maritime Trade in the Early Modern Caribben” *Slavery and Abolition*, 30:3 (2009) pp. 361-382.

taxed or regulated than merchants who follow the laws. The same logic applies to goods or activities that are prohibited by the state, such as trade with foreigners, since the smugglers ignore the mandates on trade. If, for some reason, all the restrictions on trade are removed, then the smugglers become ordinary merchants. Karras also argues that states are usually forced to tolerate smuggling to some degree since a complete cut off smuggled goods could result in an angry populace.<sup>209</sup> The idea that states and empires officially tolerate contraband can also be seen in the work of Eric Tagliacozzo, who examined the smuggling networks active in South-East Asia from the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth century. Tagliacozzo, along with others, noted that border areas between empires became strategic locations for both the strengthening of government institutions and as site for smugglers to flourish.<sup>210</sup> Robert Neuwirth suggests that states tolerate illegal trade, the black market, and the informal economy for two reasons: the difficulty of finding it, regulating it, and taxing it, and the numerous structural connections that it has with the rest of the economy.<sup>211</sup>

Similar to smuggling and the creation of an underground market, another ever-present theme in the literature on illegal trade is corruption. Although not all illegal trade requires corruption, bribes, selective enforcement of the law and other corrupt practices

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<sup>209</sup> Alan Karras, *Smuggling: Contraband and Corruption in World History* (New York, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009). See also his "'Custom Has the Force of Law': Local Officials and Contraband in the Bahamas and the Floridas, 1748-1779". Karras' *Smuggling* monograph also stands out for explicitly going against the trend of trying to quantify illegal activities and instead focuses on the social ramifications of illegal trade.

<sup>210</sup> Eric Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades, Porous Borders: Smuggling and States Along a Southeast Asian Frontier, 1865-1915* (Yale University Press, 2009). For example, see: Allan Christelow, "Contraband Trade between Jamaica and the Spanish Main"; Robin F.A. Fabel, *The Economy of British West Florida, 1763-1783* (Tuscaloosa, Ala, ., 1988); JR. McNeil, *Atlantic Empires of France and Spain: Louisbourg and Havana, 1700-1763* (Chapel Hill, N.C., University of North Carolina Press: 1985)

<sup>211</sup> Robert Neuwirth, *Stealth of Nations: The Global Rise of the Informal Economy* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011).

can ensure that illegal traders can continue to operate without interference from government officials. Much like the issues surrounding a lack of a universal definition of illegal trade, scholars (and contemporaries) have been hampered by an imprecise and evolving notion of what actions should properly be labeled as corrupt practices.<sup>212</sup> Though there is still much debate, in *Corrupt Histories*, Diego Gambetta lays out a simple, useful definition of corruption and how corruption works. Gambetta argues that corrupt practices need to involve three agents all acting in a market exchange: the Truster, the Fiduciary (acting for the Truster), and the Corrupter. If the Fiduciary breaks his obligation to the Truster and sides with the Corrupter, the act should be considered corrupt.<sup>213</sup>

Corruption within the Spanish empire, especially of royal administrators and officials, has long intrigued historians and is often seen, along with smuggling, as both a symptom and cause of Spain's decline. Governors, corregidores, and alcaldes often fell under the suspicion of authorities in Spain and elsewhere for engaging in contraband and other corrupt practices, such as giving a royal contract to a friend or family-member.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> For example, should colonial bureaucrats be held to modern standards about ethical business practices? Is it corrupt to promote the interests of one's friends and family above those of another?

<sup>213</sup> To make this definition explicit for colonial Spanish America, the Truster is the king, the Fiduciary a royal agent, and the illegal trader as the Corrupter.

<sup>214</sup> Kenneth J. Andrien has commented on how different generations of scholars have approached the topic for colonial Spanish America. He has argued that early scholars of Latin America found corruption to have no redeeming value at all while scholars influenced by the work of Max Weber have seen the positive aspects that corruption had on governance, such as forming bonds of trust and friendship that ultimately allowed Spanish authorities the ability to govern large areas of the Western Hemisphere. Kenneth J. Andrien "Corruption, Inefficiency, and Imperial Decline in the Seventeenth-Century Viceroyalty of Peru", *The Americas*, 41:1 (1984) Andrien also suggested three reasons why corruption flourished in Spanish America: (1) the inefficiency of colonial government such as shoddy record keeping and untrained officials; (2) local elites controlling local offices by purchasing them for themselves or trusted individuals; (3) Spain tried to reform certain things and sent trusted officials on *visitas*. "If corruption remained at reasonable levels, it could play a positive role in binding the interests of the Crown, the bureaucracy, and local elites into a workable imperial system. For Andrien, examples

Even for low-level positions in Nicaragua, such as a corregidor, which only paid between 250 and 275 pesos annually, there were usually more candidates for office than there were positions because of the opportunities for personal enrichment. Linda Newson estimated that corregidores could bring in around 4,000 to 5,000 pesos a year by taking bribes and smuggling goods.<sup>215</sup> Even high ranking officials charged with defending the shores from foreign smugglers, such as Captain José de Palma, commander of one of the guarda-costa fleets in the Caribbean and later the commandant of the fortress at Omoa, engaged in the illegal trade. Witnesses reported that Palma, charged with purchasing slaves from Jamaica to construct Omoa, imported a number of slaves that he kept off the official ledger, including a 16-year old girl that he reportedly purchased for 300 pesos. The rest he sold off for profit.<sup>216</sup> Despite the evidence and testimony condemning Palma's actions, nothing was done to Palma, who had been dead for three years before an investigation took place. Officials also had a difficult time rooting out low-level corruption, as evidence and a lack of personnel hindered anti-corruption efforts. For instance, in 1793, two guards employed to collect taxes in Masaya were investigated for collaborating with ranchers in the illegal sale of cattle. The *receptor* of the alcabala notified the two suspected guards that he had direct evidence (though he provided none) that they regularly permitted the sale of cattle at a nearby hacienda without collecting the proper taxes. In the end, the receptor and prosecutor decided not to hand out any charges because the two guards were not 'totally accountable' for the illegal sales but demanded

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of corruption in Peru ranged from the illegal sale of *terrias baldas* (vacant lands) to associates, extortion, not collecting taxes, and nepotism.

<sup>215</sup> Linda Newson, *Indian Survival in Colonial Nicaragua*, p. 256. For the eighteenth century, corregidores earned between 250 and 275 pesos annually. The salaries for corregidores in the eighteenth century had been increased from 150 to 200 pesos in the seventeenth century as Spain sought to hire honest, qualified administrators. See *Ibid.* 128

<sup>216</sup> Floyd, *Anglo-Spanish Struggle*, pp.111-114.

increased vigilance.<sup>217</sup>

Historians have long looked to the sale of offices by the Crown as a sign that the royal government itself was complicit in perpetuating corrupt practices (which often led to illegal trade), since the low salaries of officials was usually nowhere near the cost that the buyer made to purchase of the office.<sup>218</sup> Thus, the Crown expected its own royal officials to use the power and authority of their offices to enrich themselves along with their friends and families. Although exploiting Indian communities was usually the main avenue for improving one's financial status, especially through the *repartimiento de mercancías*, many officials also turned to illegal trade to earn back the money they spent on purchasing the office as well as to have a return on their 'investment'.<sup>219</sup> Although the Crown allowed its officials to engage in corrupt behavior and illegal business practices, there were limits to what royal agents could get away with—although these limits were not officially enumerated. Office holders generally were aware of how much they could get away with. For example, after having spent 2,000 pesos to purchase the position as corregidor of Subtiava, Alonzo Peon y Valdez wrote to the Crown asking to be transferred to another jurisdiction or have the corregimiento merged with the corregimiento of Realejo. His problem, he wrote, stemmed from the fact that corregimientos were “too small for an honest official to administer and earn a living”.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> AGCA, A3.3 (5) Exp. 766, Leg. 39. “Sobre averiguar las ventas clandestinas de ganada hibidas en San Miguelito de Masaya”. In the end, the Fiscal and regidor decided that the guards were not totally accountable for the illegal trade, but demanded increased vigilance.

<sup>218</sup> “Their purchase prices reflected the level of competition to occupy them, which, in turn, was based on the illicit income their proprietor could expect to gain.” Brown, *Aycinea*, p. 27

<sup>219</sup> Wortman notes that the position of *juez de milpas*, which had legal authority to compel Indian tributaries to work, became a position well-known for corruption in the early colonial period. *Government and Society in Central America, 1680-1840*, p. 10.

<sup>220</sup> AGI, Guatemala,409, “Consultas, Decretos, y Reales Ordenes #7. Valdez also noted that he was terribly ill and a long way from his beloved family, which he left behind in the Yucatan. Valdez was also not

In this instance, “too small’ probably meant that there were too few Indians (or they were too poor) to extort money from or there was little active commerce to regulate. As a self-proclaimed ‘honest’ official, it seems likely that Valdez thought that if he tried to regain the purchase price of his office from the limited resources residents of his corregimiento had, he might provoke a violent conflict. Typically, it was only when the corruption threatened royal authority, provoked a rebellion, or angered powerful commercial or political rivals did the Crown act against illegal behavior within its own ranks. Even if royal officials chose not to participate in illegal trading schemes or engage in corrupt practices, they could still facilitate smuggling out of fear for their careers. Karras' study of the contraband trade in the Caribbean found that local officials tried not to call too much attention to the smuggling that occurred in their jurisdictions, as they feared doing so would jeopardize their careers.<sup>221</sup>

### **Illegal Trade from the Early Colonial Period to Mid-Eighteenth Century**

Scholars have noted that the contraband trade was alive and well in Central America prior to the mid-eighteenth century. In the aftermath of the Spanish invasions into the Central American isthmus via Mexico and Panama, the Crown tried to institute strict mercantilist policies. However, a lack of oversight, regional power struggles, and changing circumstances led to a lax environment where it was possible to avoid the taxes

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alone in thinking that the opportunities for enrichment as a royal official in Nicaragua were not sufficient. The corregidor in Realejo in 1767 asked for permission to go into business for himself, as there were few chances to earn money from ships docked in port, since Realejo was rarely utilized in the late eighteenth century. AGCA, A3.6 (5) Exp. 3624, Leg. 478, “Testimonio de la informacion recibida a peticion del corregidor del Realejo que por estar falto de recursos se le permita dedicarse al comercio.” See also, David Radell and James J. Parsos, "Realejo: A Forgotten Colonial Port and Shipbuilding Center in Nicaragua." *The Hispanic-American Historical Review*, 51: 295-312, 1971.

<sup>221</sup> Karras, “Custom has the Force of Law”,

and restrictions that the Crown put on economic activities. In the early colonial period the type of goods exchanged in illegal trade shifted rapidly in response to internal and external market forces as well as government reforms. Perhaps the best example of the changing nature of the early colonial period can be seen in the exportation of indigenous slaves. For a period of time in the mid-sixteenth century, the most valuable commodity that the Spanish exported from Central America was Indian slaves. Sometimes charging as much as 200 pesos per slave, Spanish colonial authorities sent between 50,000 and 500,000 Indians (mainly from Nicaragua) to work as porters in Panama, as Indian auxiliaries to subjugate new lands in South America, or work in the mines of Peru.<sup>222</sup> Despite the large numbers and huge profits, the trade in Indian slaves violated Spanish laws and customs.<sup>223</sup> Yet the trade continued unfettered, as officials were reluctant to stop the lucrative trade. In 1529, Pedrarias Dávila wrote to the Crown to report that he had banned the export of Indian slaves, however a few months later he organized several shipments of slaves. In 1536, and again with the promulgation of the New Laws in 1542, the Crown forbade the export of indigenous slaves. However, local authorities were either powerless to stop the trade or were actively involved in it. It was only in the 1550s, as Indians that could be used as slaves began to be harder and harder to find in Nicaragua, that officials were able to stop the trade.<sup>224</sup> After the trade in Indian slaves ended, illegal traders turned to other items to export, such as indigo and cacao, to Mexico and beyond.

For the sixteenth and most of the seventeenth century, illegal trade in Central

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<sup>222</sup> Newsom, *Indian Survival*, p. 104. She states that the governor of Nicaragua in the 1530s, Francisco de Castañeda, was able to inflate the prices of slaves by buying them cheaply and then limiting the number of people who could legally buy them. Most slaves, however, sold for far less. On the number of Indian slaves exported, see *Ibid.* and Sherman,

<sup>223</sup> Spanish laws allowed Indians in the New World to be enslaved only if they resisted Spanish domination, which followed the legal tradition known as 'Just War', developed by Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>224</sup> MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*, pp. 50-52. See also, Newsom, *Indian Survival*, pp.104-105.

America has been characterized as slow to start because of the inhospitable terrain along the eastern coast and lack of profitable exports. However, MacLeod states that the illegal foreign trade steadily increased from the early-seventeenth century until it became systemic by the eighteenth century. The reason for the increase, MacLeod argues, came from European (mostly British and Dutch, and later French) demand for indigo from El Salvador and later cacao from Costa Rica, and Central American desires for manufactured goods. Furthermore, during the seventeenth century English log-cutters and reformed pirates began to make semi-permanent settlements along the Caribbean coast, stretching from the Yucatan to southern Nicaragua. Over time, these areas became hotbeds of contraband activity, as merchants from the Spanish areas of Central America came to trade for European products.<sup>225</sup> The illegal trade between the Spanish colonies and these logging camps became a lifeline for the Central American economy during periods of economic decline, as legal shipping stayed away from areas they thought unprofitable. Richmond Brown has argued that smuggling played a major role in the region's economic recovery of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, as production of silver and indigo began to recover from its decades-long downturn, illegal trade expanded.<sup>226</sup>

Apart from economic pressures, the decline of Spanish power in the seventeenth century ushered in a new phase of illegal trade. Pirates, smugglers, and foreign colonists occupied a number of strategic locations in the Caribbean, including the important islands of Jamaica, Providence, Curacao, and Roatan, as well as made inroads on the mainland, such as in Florida, Belize, and the Mosquito Coast. From these positions, it was possible

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<sup>225</sup> MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*, especially pp. 351-370.

<sup>226</sup> Brown indicated that smuggling indigo and silver helped propel merchant activities in the region. Brown, *Juan Fermín de Aycinena*.

to carry on commercial relations with Spanish subjects and allowed for attacks on Spanish towns and cities. Indeed, the frequency and severity of attacks on Spanish towns—and the inability of Spanish forces to stop them—led to the partial abandonment or relocation of many settlements in Central America, including Trujillo and Nueva Segovia, among others. More importantly, attacks on Spanish shipping led to a reduction in legitimate trade and contributed to a long economic depression. Merchants and their insurers remained reluctant to send ships to areas of pirate activity and low returns. When Guatemalan merchants tried to arrange a shipment of wine from Spain to land in Honduras in 1670, merchants in Seville scoffed at the proposal. Not only was the promise of indigo as payment considered insufficient, they stated that “no one will make a trip to the Port of Honduras because there is no force to oppose the pirates that infest those coasts.”<sup>227</sup> The lack of regular commercial contact with Spain produced a scarcity in European goods which illegal traders happily took advantage of.

Recognizing the limitations of its ability to protect its colonies in the New World in the late seventeenth century, Spain signed a series of treaties (Treaty of Madrid 1667 and 1670) and other agreements with the English. These accords sought to curtail pirate attacks on shipping and raids on settlements in the Caribbean by outlawing piracy. They also attempted to end unauthorized commerce between Spanish and English subjects, since the agreements barred ships of one nation stopping in the ports of the other nation.<sup>228</sup> Although the treaties helped to diminish the threat of piracy, instead of working to reduce illegal trade, the curtailment of piracy and the agreements with the English fostered a new environment where it was even easier to smuggle goods into Spanish

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<sup>227</sup> Wortman, *Government and Society in Central America, 1680-1840*, p. 22

<sup>228</sup> Floyd, *Anglo-Spanish Struggle*

America. Using their knowledge of the region—as well as their skills in avoiding Spanish authorities—many former pirates became smugglers and merchants or the crews for illegal traders.<sup>229</sup> Furthermore, the treaties gave a number of concessions to England, including recognizing all lands under English possession in the West Indies and North America, and allowed the English to sell slaves in Jamaica to the Spanish governors in Havana, Portobello, and Cartagena.<sup>230</sup> By giving up claims to a number of areas in the Caribbean, the Spanish legitimated British colonialism which in time grew in terms of population and economic importance, providing a base to further undercut Spanish rule.<sup>231</sup> Moreover, Article X of the 1670 Treaty of Madrid provided a perfect excuse for English ships to enter into Spanish ports, as it allowed ships in distress (e.g., lack of water, needing repairs, or a storm in the area) the ability to come into port until the situation improved. Naturally, illegal traders used this loophole to their advantage. There are several descriptions of how foreign traders traded used provisions from this and other treaties to enter into Spanish ports under false pretenses. One such account, from 1747, comes from John Campbell, an English trader who operated principally in the West Indies:

Ships frequently approach the Spanish coasts under pretense of wanting water, wood, provisions, or more commonly, in order to stop a leak. The first thing that is done in such a case, is to inform the governor of their great distress, and, as if in full proof thereof to send a very considerable present. By this means leave is obtained to come on shore, to erect a warehouse, and unload the ship; but then all this is performed under the eye of the King's officers, and the goods are regularly entered in a register as they are

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<sup>229</sup> Kris Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, p. 41

<sup>230</sup> For information on the treaties, For the ramifications of these treaties in Central America, see Mack, “Contraband Trade Through Trujillo”, p.47 and Frank G. Dawson, "William Pitt's settlement at Black River on the Mosquito Shore: a challenge to Spain in Central America, 1732-87," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 63(4): 677-706, 1983. On slave trading, see Ward, *Imperial Panama*, p. 152

<sup>231</sup> Wortman, *Government and Society*, pp. 89-90. Although not the only reason for the growth of British colonies such as Jamaica, legitimizing the English claim probably had a hand in spurring investment and population growth, as the risk of Spanish attacks on English became less likely once the Treaty of Madrid was signed.

brought into the warehouse which when full is shut up and the doors sealed. All these precautions taken, the business is effectually carried on in the night by a back-door, and the European goods being taken out, Indigo, cochineal, vanilla, tobacco, and above all bars of silver and pieces of eight are very exactly packed in the same crates and placed in the same crates and placed as they stood before.<sup>232</sup>

Campbell's account provides clear evidence of how widespread illegal trade was as well as how involved local authorities were. His writings also demonstrate how English possessions in the Caribbean Basin, the slave trade, and faking distress served as cover for illicit merchandise to change hands.

Domestic forms of illegal trade during the seventeenth century, such as evading taxes, were widespread, though infrequently prosecuted. Royal officials often only became aware of possible corruption or illegal trade in a region well after the fact, such as during a *juicio de residencia* (official review). Still, Wortman argues that the Hapsburgs system of rewards—mainly tax incentives and pensions—linked the interests of the Crown with local elites and officials, thus reducing the amount of excessive corruption and illegal trade.<sup>233</sup> Nonetheless, or perhaps because of official tolerance of these activities, illegal trade became ingrained into everyday life and would prove difficult to eradicate in the eighteenth century under the Bourbons. Merchants (as well as other subjects and entire communities) would try to avoid taxes if they could by legal and sometimes illegal means. Putting tax-free money into *cofradías* was a well-established and legal practice to pay for a community's needs, although royal authorities often complained that the priest or powerful family ran the organization for their own benefit.<sup>234</sup> The evasion of taxes, such as the *barlavento* and the *alcabala*, was a widespread activity, especially in the more remote areas of the region, where a small bribe to the *corregidor* or

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<sup>232</sup> John Campbell, *The Spanish Empire in America*, London, 1747, pp. 317-318

<sup>233</sup> Wortman, *Government and Society in Central America, 1680-1840*, p. 18

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43-46. See also Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred*

alcalde avoided a tax. The collection of the royal quinto (especially in new strikes) also suffered. For example, Joseph Descals alleged that after he lost control of a lucrative gold mining operation in La Corpus, Honduras, the royal fifth was rarely collected by officials. Although this accusation was an attempt to implicate the new faction running the mine, treasury officials noted that no revenue had ever been collected from the mines in La Corpus.<sup>235</sup> Though tax collection rates remained the highest around the seat of colonial power in Central America in Santiago de Guatemala, even those fell when the rates increased in the 1650s.

Success for illegal traders during the early-to-mid colonial period depended largely on inefficiencies, regulations, and taxes built into the system of legal trade. Although illegal traders also had to deal with supply chains, risks, and expenses in selling their products, they could remain confident that they could undercut the official competition and still make a profit. Any legal commerce sent to the Americas needed to be approved by and purchased from middlemen in Spain, where they taxed and controlled the goods sent to Spain's overseas empire. Well-connected merchant families belonging to the *Consulado de mercaderes* (merchants' guild), with trusted agents on both sides of the Atlantic, dominated this system.<sup>236</sup> Goods that came from other parts of Europe were subject to additional taxes; although foreigners used usually skirted this regulation by appointing a Spanish subject to oversee the business. The profits and taxes taken in Seville (and later Cadiz) pushed the price of goods up. Other factors also increased the cost of goods arriving from Europe. The flota system, developed as a response to privateers and pirates, made for slow and expensive transportation of goods. The logistics

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<sup>235</sup> Wortman, *Government and Society*, p.97 and note 19, p 305. Later, the poor rate of collecting taxes at Honduran mines led the Crown to establish treasury offices in Tegucigalpa.

<sup>236</sup> The *consulado* worked in conjunction with the *Casa de Contratación*.

of arranging the departure of the fleet, the outfitting of warships to escort the trading ships, and the long times that the fleet stayed at the fairs in the New World contributed to escalating costs. Shipwrecks, bad weather, and errors in navigation could delay, reroute, or even totally destroy entire cargoes.<sup>237</sup> If the goods came ashore, the crew deposited them in warehouses, where royal officials assigned the appropriate customs duties. Once these duties were paid, representatives of the merchant houses transported their goods to the main population centers (e.g., Mexico City or Lima) by mule and then distributed them to their commercial agents, who in turn sold them to petty merchants, who then sold the goods to local populations.<sup>238</sup> This long list of middlemen and long supply chains added to the high costs of imported goods from Europe and made contraband goods competitive. Moreover, because of the restrictions on trade and the need for profit, trading ships generally neglected marginal areas of the empire, such as Central America, and fostered a dependence on illegal trade with foreigners in order to acquire most goods.<sup>239</sup> Additionally, the Crown decreed that certain items, such as wine, olive oil, and wool had to be sourced from Spain. Goods found locally, such as hides, cotton cloth, or foodstuff and meant for trade within the Audiencia of Guatemala also had to

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<sup>237</sup> See Jeremy Baskes, "Risky Ventures: Reconsidering Mexico's Colonial Trade System", *Colonial Latin American Review* No. 1 Vol. 14, (2005) pp. 27-54 which found that the high rates charged to ship owners for insurance were actually quite rational and not overly expensive considering the value of goods on board a typical ship and the numbers of ships that were lost at sea.

<sup>238</sup> The irregular visits of the fleets also produced a significant side-effect: the economy's dependence on credit supplied by merchants and the Church. This aspect of the trans-Atlantic trade meant that producers of export commodities had to rely on local merchants as creditors, as they lacked the capital to pay their expenses. Merchant-creditors used their position to purchase goods, for example, indigo, at rates well-below market value. The credit system extended all the way from large merchant houses to poor urban residents, who needed to use credit to buy everyday items such as bread. See Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660-1720* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

<sup>239</sup> This point was raised relatively early in the historical literature. See, for example, Adan Szasdi de Nagy, "El comercio ilícito en la provincia de Honduras", *Revista de Indias*, 17 (1957) p.271

deal with taxes, regulations, and middlemen. Illegal traders skirted these too, thus creating an advantage by not paying taxes as well as selling black market goods.<sup>240</sup>

Spanish officials had long recognized the need to combat illegal trade and developed imperial, regional, and local strategies. Once it became clear that early settlers and conquistadors could not be trusted to reliably collect taxes, the royal quinto, or faithfully follow laws and orders from Spain, the Crown began a program to increase royal oversight of its empire. Empire-wide, it ensured the dominance of the Seville merchant guild to regulate legal trade through legislation. The Crown also sent trusted officials, born usually in Spain, to supervise the administration of Spain's colonies and to make sure royal interests were protected. Viceroys, captain generals, governors, and lesser officials were all charged with enforcing royal laws, which included economic regulations and taxes. More directly the Crown established uniform markings (such as official tax stamps and *papel sellado*) and procedures (such as checking cargoes at ports) that sought to prevent contraband goods from entering the marketplace.

Regionally, as pirate attacks became more frequent in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Spain established coast-guard patrols in the Caribbean to protect shipping and to stop unauthorized trading.<sup>241</sup> Owing to the region's relatively minor economic importance for legitimate trade, the ships responsible for protecting Central America's eastern border were split among units stationed in Campeche and Cartagena. Although they partially succeeded in deterring attacks on legitimate shipping near Campeche and Cartagena, the coast-guard fleet was less successful in catching

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<sup>240</sup> It is important to note though, goods acquired through illegal means or items purchased without paying tax does not mean that traders have to sell them on the black market. Rather, goods be brought in and out of the legal market fairly easily. For example, a rancher could buy a stolen cow, re-brand it, and sell it legitimately at the annual fair.

<sup>241</sup> The barlavento tax of 1% that was added to goods was designed to fund this fleet.

contraband traders, especially in areas away from their home ports. Moreover, the vessels and crews proved expensive to operate and maintain, especially in the seventeenth century as the Spanish economy declined. Regional practices to contain illegal trade also occurred on land. For example, by tightly controlling the sale of mercury through a royal monopoly, the Crown could accurately estimate the amount of taxes owed by individual miners.<sup>242</sup> These estimates allowed treasury officials to reliably collect the quinto and reduced tax evasion.

Spanish officials charged with upholding economic regulations and collecting taxes at the local level also used a variety of strategies to deal with illegal trade. They organized militia units to patrol the countryside in areas of known contraband activities and set up checkpoints along roads and in towns to collect taxes on merchandise. Spanish officials (usually corregidores) also went to Indian communities to ensure the collection of tribute and to make sure that Spanish merchants were not illegally selling goods to locals. These active strategies were supplemented by passive ones too, such as using rumors and denunciations from local residents to locate illegal activities. The officials (as well as those that provided information) had a financial incentive to uphold the law: they received a portion (usually a third to a half) of the value of the goods, once officials auctioned them off.<sup>243</sup> Despite these actions, illegal trade continued to be a problem in Central America. Local officials were frequently involved in the contraband trade or accepted bribes from those that were. The infrequent patrols from coast-guard ships

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<sup>242</sup> Miners needed to use mercury for silver mining, where silver ore was amalgamated with mercury through a procedure called the 'patio process'. MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*, pp.150-151.

<sup>243</sup> Additionally, personal histories and other economic factors (such as eliminating a competitor) were also incentives to denounce someone. In many ways, these cases operated in a similar manner to allegations made in *jucio de residencias* and Inquisition cases, where 'rumor' and common knowledge could be used against someone.

stationed in Campeche and Cartagena did little to deter unauthorized trading, and militia patrols and checkpoints could be avoided.

The eastern and central portions of Central America experienced even less supervision from colonial authorities. While the Audiencia of Guatemala has sometimes been referred to as a colonial backwater, the isolated and lightly populated eastern and interior sections of Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica truly lived up to the name.<sup>244</sup> And it was this isolation from centers of Spanish rule that allowed the region to evolve into a major hub for contraband. The region's many inlets, bays, rivers, and islands along the Caribbean coast provided the perfect environment for clandestine trade. Moreover, the region also contained a large population of unconquered indigenous groups, most notably the Zambo-Moskitos. These indigenous groups both facilitated the development of illegal trade with Spanish Central America by actively engaging in the trade and provided a strong deterrent for any Spanish incursions to try and stop illicit activity. The situation along the Honduran coast had deteriorated so badly that in 1737 the captain-general “declared that the ports of this shore were used for no other purpose than as shelters for foreign ships and that the inhabitants of the whole territory, including the clergy and the highest officials, were interested solely in illicit trade.”<sup>245</sup>

### **Bourbon Changes to the Economy and the Creation of the Tobacco Monopoly**

In Central America, the process of collecting new monies began in 1763 when Francisco Valdez was appointed to head the newly created *Administración de Alcabala y Barlovento* (The Sales Tax and Indian Tax Administration). This institution administered

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<sup>244</sup> Woodward, *Central America: A Nation Divided* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998)

<sup>245</sup> Brown, “Contraband Trade”, p. 185.

all aspects of taxation within the region and replaced contracted tax farmers with royal officials who were seen as more loyal and efficient. Despite initial protests from the Cabildo of Guatemala City, Valdes accomplished his task rather quickly and increased revenues. A further boost to the royal coffers came when Charles raised taxes in Spain and in the Americas. For example, in 1763, he raised the *alcabala* (sales tax) from 3% to 4%.<sup>246</sup> In another point of departure from tradition, Bourbon officials also stipulated that by 1766 the *alcabala* should be charged every time goods were resold, instead of only at the final sale.<sup>247</sup> These reforms set the tone of Charles' reforms in the Americas and later attempts at increasing government revenue, especially the tobacco monopoly, would draw inspiration from these early measures.

Charles III also redesigned the way the colonies were administered by reducing the power of entrenched local groups. In order to diminish the power and influence of large administrative cities like Mexico City, Lima, and Guatemala City, Spain ordered an expansion of the intendency system in 1787.<sup>248</sup> Borrowing the idea from the French, this system sought to strengthen municipal governments and bring all territorial divisions into some sense of uniformity and equality, with a clearer line of authority. Charles and his advisors hoped this new system would redistribute some of the political and economic clout of regional elites in large cities, thereby increasing the overall power of the Spanish royal government. Historians such as Jordana Dym have argued that the creation of intendancies in Central America helped to decrease the political power of Guatemala City within the Kingdom of Guatemala because León, Salvador, Chiapas, and Comayagua

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<sup>246</sup> Wortman, "Bourbon Reforms in Central America: 1750-1786," pp. 222-228.

<sup>247</sup> Wortman, p. 144

<sup>248</sup> Dym, *From Sovereign Villages*, 51.

received increased authority over military, economic, and political affairs in their intendancies.<sup>249</sup>

One such group that Bourbon reformers directly took on were the vested interests of the merchant class. In the Audiencia of Guatemala, many of these initiatives happened under the authority of Captain-General Matías de Gálvez (1779-1783), who brought a sustained campaign against the merchant-creditors in Guatemala who used their traditional hold on legal trade and access to credit to dominate the political and economic system of the region. Residents throughout the Audiencia often complained that the system was unfair to producers of key goods and to residents of outlying towns. Indigo growers in El Salvador complained that the Guatemalan merchants used their dual role as the indigo farmers' main source of credit and their exclusive buyer to force the growers to sell at below the market rates.<sup>250</sup> Residents of the rural town Estelí remarked that the Guatemalan merchants “dress us at prices that keep us more nude than clothed,” and would use any pretext to “ruin us and seize our lands.”<sup>251</sup> Ultimately, many of the changes that Galvez proposed proved to be unenforceable, such as making all foreign trade pass through Omoa, or were quickly worked around, such as his attempts to force Guatemalan merchants to buy indigo at fixed rates.<sup>252</sup>

A relatively simple way for the Spanish government to earn more money was to establish an *estanco* (a government-controlled monopoly). A government monopoly

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid. Dym also notes that the elevation of León, Salvador, Chiapas, and Comayagua to the status of capitals of intendancies exacerbated tensions between those capital cities and other large cities within the intendancies. For example, Granada resented being subordinate to León, and Tegucigalpa to Comayagua.

<sup>250</sup> Wortman, *Spanish Society*.

<sup>251</sup> Troy S. Floyd, “Guatemalan merchants, the Government, and the Provincianos, 1750-1800” *Hispanic American Historical Review*

<sup>252</sup> Floyd, *Anglo-Spanish Struggle*.

raises revenue by only allowing those with government licenses to legally produce and/or sell certain goods. In this manner, the government can set the price of a particular good and demand that after production and administrative costs are considered, the remaining profit goes to the government instead of merchants. In Spanish colonial America, monopolies were established in one of two ways. The most basic monopoly employed by the Spanish colonial administrators in the mid-1750s was when the government only regulated the final sale of products. An example of this can be found in the monopoly on *aguardiente* (a liquor usually made from sugar cane juice), established in 1753. The government taxed the sale of the alcoholic drink, but not the raw ingredients involved in its production. Sugar played an important role in the economy of Central America, as such, the cultivation of sugar cane was ubiquitous in Central America and therefore impractical to regulate. A more pervasive monopoly was used at the end of the colonial period. In addition to selling monopolized goods at government-licensed stores, this stronger type of monopoly controlled the production of the raw materials needed for the final product. The tobacco monopoly provides the best example of this. As experience and account books soon demonstrated, the more control the government had over all levels of production, the greater its share of the profits. Over time, Spanish officials set up various *estancos*, including those that regulated: *aguardiente*, cock fights, gun powder, ice, playing cards, and tobacco.<sup>253</sup> Of these monopolies, tobacco quickly became the major source of funding for the administration and defense of the American colonies.<sup>254</sup> In

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<sup>253</sup> Although the most successful, tobacco was not the first monopoly created in Central America. In 1758 an *estanco* of *aguardiente* was established. Wortman, "Bourbon Reforms in Central America", 226.

<sup>254</sup> In fact, tobacco trailed only silver mining in the amount of money raised for the government in the Mexican and Peruvian viceroyalties. Interestingly, although the tobacco monopoly generated a significant amount of money in the colonies, as an export commodity to Europe, tobacco was only important to Cuba and Colombia, the latter only marginally so.

the Audiencia of Guatemala, the tobacco monopoly would grow to account for more than 50% of the revenues collected by the Audiencia.<sup>255</sup> It also became a new source for illicit traders to make profits.

In the Audiencia of Guatemala, tobacco cultivation before the implementation of the monopoly stretched from Chiapas to Costa Rica. However, major centers of production tended to be located in Copán (Honduras), around the towns of Ixtepec and Chinameca (El Salvador), and the Central Valley of Costa Rica because of their volcanic soil, good climate, and lack of competition from other, more profitable, commodities. Unlike other important crops produced in Central America (such as indigo, sugar, and cacao) that were dominated by large growers, tobacco cultivation was generally done by small and medium growers. There are two reasons for this arrangement. First, tobacco could be grown by nearly anyone with basic gardening skills.<sup>256</sup> Tobacco plants require little maintenance and could be grown alongside crops used for food. After being harvested, the tobacco leaves were immediately placed in areas where they could be cured, such as a small shed or even the grower's house.<sup>257</sup> Once cured and dried, the tobacco then was either sold at a local market or bought by merchants, who then sold it to tobacco manufacturers in urban areas.<sup>258</sup> Although the income that resulted from tobacco growing was small, usually amounting to gross earnings of around 50 to 500 pesos per year, this revenue provided growers with money to purchase household goods and to pay

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<sup>255</sup> Jordanna Dym, *From Sovereign Villages to Nation-State* (University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque), 2006. p.49

<sup>256</sup> These skills, weeding and watering, could be done by anyone in the family, especially women and children.

<sup>257</sup> For example, the *guardas volantes* in the López case mentioned in the introduction found tobacco being dried in his house. See AGCA, A 3.13 (5), Leg. 442, Exp. 3331.

<sup>258</sup> Most tobacco growers at the time either air-cured their tobacco or fire-cured them.

taxes or tribute.<sup>259</sup> This additional income became especially important to indigenous communities after 1747, when the Philip V converted Indian tribute payments from in-kind to hard currency.<sup>260</sup> The relative ease that tobacco plants could be grown and harvested, their ability to be grown with other crops, and the money that it provided made them an attractive option for small landowners who could not raise the capital necessary for the cultivation of other crops.

A second factor that contributed to tobacco cultivation becoming the specialty of small landowners was the overall disinterest of larger landowners to grow the crop. As Susan Deans-Smith has shown for Mexico, which experienced similar cultivation patterns as the Audiencia of Guatemala before the monopoly, large landowners generally stayed out of tobacco production because profit margins were low.<sup>261</sup> Because nearly everyone could and did grow tobacco, the returns on tobacco cultivation were considered by large landowners to be too low when other options provided a larger return on their investment. Although indigo, sugar, and cacao needed initial investment capital and required a large labor force to harvest the plants or expensive machinery to make the final good, the profits that one could make on them generally were much higher than on

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<sup>259</sup> More data on this issue is needed, however these early findings seem to corroborate the findings of Deans-Smith, who found that in Mexico in 1765, tobacco growers received about 2.5 *reales* per pound of 2nd grade (or average quality) tobacco. My estimate of gross income comes from averaging quantities of tobacco grown by individuals in Nicaragua that I have collected, which usually ranged between 400 pounds to 2,000 pounds of dried tobacco a year. The prices that tobacco fetched depended on its quality and market conditions. One peso is equal to about eight *reales*. For quantities of tobacco grown by small producers, see AGCA, A 3.13 (5), Leg. 442. Exp. 3331, AGCA, A 3.13 (5), Leg. 492. Exp. 3747, and AGCA, A 3.13 (5), Leg. 425. Exp. 3166.

<sup>260</sup> David McCreery, *Rural Guatemala: 1760-1940*, pp. 18.

<sup>261</sup> Deans-Smith, pp. 17. The situation seems to be different for Cuba, where despite the enduring myth that Cuba's tobacco farmers (*vegueros*) were largely poor, white, Canary Islanders, it seems that tobacco growers could come from *all* sectors of society. Charlotte Cosner, "Rich and Poor, White and Black, Slave and Free: The Social History of Cuba's Tobacco Farmers, 1763-1817" PhD Dissertation, Florida International University, 2008.

tobacco.<sup>262</sup> These same reasons of large investments in labor and machinery made indigo, sugar, and cacao farming prohibitive for small landowners and contributed to their roles as tobacco growers for the entire region. Spanish officials noticed the trend that small producers grew nearly all of the tobacco in Central America. One official, commenting a decade after the establishment of the monopoly wrote about conditions prior to the monopoly, "...in the whole Kingdom there was not one grower [of tobacco] who produced more than 30 *tercios*".<sup>263</sup> While this remark is an exaggeration as there were some growers who produced more than 30 *tercios*, it lends support to the argument that small farmers provided the Kingdom with most of its tobacco. As demand for tobacco increased over the years as its use became more common, women, Indians, and poor mestizo farmers planted tobacco in their gardens and on their land to meet the need.

Not only did poor and indigenous producers grow most of the region's tobacco, they also manufactured and sold the final product of the tobacco leaf: snuff, cigars, pipe tobacco, and cigarettes.<sup>264</sup> However, unlike tobacco cultivation, which occurred in rural areas, most of the manufacture and sale of tobacco took place in urban centers. While some manufacturing happened in rural areas, the vast majority of cigars, cigarettes, and the like were made in urban areas in order to be closer to the market that the manufactures would eventually sell to. These small producers would buy tobacco either directly from several different growers or buy it from a merchant who had purchased it from growers. The producers, usually women on their own or in small groups, would then take the tobacco back to their home to cut the leaves into the proper size to make the

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<sup>262</sup> See Robert S. Smith, "Indigo Production and Trade in Colonial Guatemala," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 39 (1959), pp. 181-211.

<sup>263</sup> A *tercio* is a bundle of tobacco leaves, usually about 170 pounds in weight. Muñoz, "El tabaco en Guatemala".

<sup>264</sup> Fallas, *La factroía de Costa Rica*, 87.

desired tobacco product. Once completed, the producers would then sell the tobacco at the town market or would directly sell their cigars and cigarettes to local businesses, especially taverns and *pulperías* (corner stores). The establishment of the tobacco monopoly, which limited who could grow tobacco and where it was sold, would dramatically alter the lives of the people at the margins of society: the poor, women, and Indians.<sup>265</sup> It was these groups that gained an essential proportion of their income from tobacco sales and cultivation that fulfilled basic needs. Once deprived of this legitimate source of revenue, many turned to contraband in order to augment their incomes.

When Spanish officials came to the Kingdom of Guatemala to install the tobacco monopoly, they already had several examples on which to base the monopoly's organization. Colonial tobacco monopolies were initially modeled after the well-established one operating in Spain since the 1630s and predate the Bourbon reformers. However, it was not until the Bourbons that tobacco monopolies began to be installed in the Americas. Although the Spanish opened the first monopoly in Cuba in 1717, it took several decades for a tobacco monopoly to spread to the other areas of the colonies. The implementation of the tobacco monopolies in the New World exhibit the limitations of Bourbon absolutism, as it was not introduced in a top-down manner, but rather implemented in a piecemeal manner: Peru's was implemented in 1752, Chile's and La Plata's in 1753, in New Spain's in 1765.<sup>266</sup>

The genesis of the tobacco monopoly in Central America began with the arrival of one of Charles III's most able colonial officials, José de Gálvez in New Spain in 1761. Gálvez zealously pushed through many reforms in his job as *visitador* (inspector), among

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 85-97.

<sup>266</sup> Also in 1766 Spanish officials instituted the tobacco monopoly in the Philippines.

which was the establishment of a tobacco monopoly in New Spain.<sup>267</sup> He shared the reforming spirit with Sebastián Calvo de la Puerta, whom he named sub-visitador to the kingdom of Guatemala. On 4 November 1765, de la Puerta issued a *real orden* (royal decree) to establish an *estanco* of tobacco in Central America. This order (and another one issued on 8 February 1766) set into motion the creation of the tobacco monopoly in Central America.<sup>268</sup>

While 1765 stands as the year that the tobacco monopoly officially began, government involvement in the production and sale of tobacco in Central America dates further back. The creation of the monopoly only formalized the pre-existing relationship between the government and producers and consumers. Initially, tobacco exports were subject to extra taxation. For example, five years before the tobacco monopoly was created, growers in Costa Rica had to pay for a special license to be able to export to Tierra Firme (Panama).<sup>269</sup> In areas where tobacco production could not keep up with demand, the government acted as a middleman and organized the importation of tobacco from other areas within the kingdom. In Nicaragua, independent buyers signed agreements with the Crown to purchase tobacco in bulk from Costa Rican growers and transport it by mule to Granada, Nicaragua's second largest city. Government presence in the trade was strengthened further in 1760 when the Governor of Costa Rica issued a *bando* (decree) stipulating that growers could only sell to these government buyers.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Deans-Smith, *Bureaucrats, Planters, and Workers* pp. 20

<sup>268</sup> The 8 February decree proclaimed that the king considered the tobacco monopoly acceptable because other sovereigns have them and that since it is not necessary for human life, it is acceptable to tax. "...que no hay Príncipe Soberano, que en sus dominios, no tenga estancado el Tabaco en Polvo, y Rama, como fruto no necesario á la vida humana." Quoted from, Muñoz, "El establecimiento de estanco del tabaco," pp. 110.

<sup>269</sup> Fallas, p. 31.

<sup>270</sup> Fallas, p. 32

This level of government involvement in tobacco reveals that officials already knew of the potential revenue source that tobacco represented. In addition, these experiences in managing tobacco production provided insights into the workings of the market.

The first act of the newly created tobacco monopoly was to collect data on the tobacco market within the kingdom. The new director, Francisco Valdés, commissioned studies to ascertain the most effective methods for implementing the new estanco. In his study on the first decade of the tobacco monopoly in Santiago de Guatemala (Antigua), the Guatemalan historian Jorge Luján Muñoz found that one of Valdés' first tasks was to find a way to set fair prices. To accomplish this, he obliged everyone connected to the cultivation or sale of tobacco to make sworn testimonies and declare how much they usually paid for their tobacco and what their operating costs were. In this manner, the tobacco administrators could accurately discover the market value of the tobacco. This allowed them to determine what their profit levels should be. A few weeks later, Valdés issued another decree demanding that merchants and producers turn in their tobacco stockpiles, which the authorities promised would be fairly paid according to the responses received the previous weeks. The last step in the creation of the monopoly was the designation of areas where tobacco could be grown.<sup>271</sup> The monopoly restricted cultivation to specific areas because it was determined that controlling contraband would be easier if all of the legitimate growers operated in a few select regions where officials could keep a close watch.

Monopoly officials, after several years of deliberations, eventually designated

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<sup>271</sup> This process occurred first in Santiago de Guatemala, the capital of the Audiencia, from February to April, 1766. In other areas, this process took longer to complete. Muñoz, "El establecimiento de estanco del tabaco", 112.

four regions throughout the kingdom to provide the necessary tobacco. Over time, officials eventually settled on the three major regions of tobacco production (Copán, Chinameca, and the Central Valley of Costa Rica) along with a valley near Ciudad Real in Chiapas as areas that could legally produce tobacco. These restrictions placed on growing tobacco in the region meant that Nicaragua had to import its tobacco from other regions. By the 1780s, over 90% of Nicaragua's supply came from Costa Rica, with the remainder coming from Copán and Chinameca.<sup>272</sup> Inside the authorized regions, the monopoly officials contracted large landowners to grow tobacco on a yearly basis. The decision to buy from large landowners and not people usually associated with tobacco cultivation derived from Bourbon ideas of economic efficiency. Tobacco officials believed that large plantations could deliver the product to the monopoly more efficiently, at a higher quality, and at a lower price than small producers.<sup>273</sup> These restrictions made it illegal for anyone to cultivate tobacco outside of the designated regions and criminalized a traditional source of income for marginalized populations.

#### *The Implementation and Operation of the Tobacco Monopoly, 1766-1808*

After monopoly officials in Guatemala designated growing regions, they then began the process of organizing and running the monopoly. This entailed creating a government network of warehouses, workshops, and stores for the tobacco to be stored, manufactured, and sold in. The monopoly also set about to hire the personnel that would staff the monopoly's branches. While the official creation of the monopoly took only a few months, in practice, the monopoly took several years to become operable beyond

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<sup>272</sup> Fallas, *La factoría de tabacos*, p. 78; Muñoz, "El establecimiento de estanco del tabaco,"

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.* 83.

main cities and did not effectively control the tobacco market until the 1780s.

Bureaucratic and logistical problems bogged down full implementation of the monopoly while indifference and resistance from segments of the population forced authorities to reconsider and alter their original designs (described in the next section). The delays and difficulties of the creation of the monopoly, along with poor organization, contributed to making contraband an attractive option for marginalized groups in society who suddenly found themselves without their customary incomes from tobacco cultivation or manufacturing.

While the organization of the tobacco monopoly in Central America was loosely based on the monopoly that operated in Spain since the 1630s, a more direct influence on the organization and operation of the monopoly came from those established in Cuba, Peru, and most importantly, in New Spain.<sup>274</sup> In those areas, the organization of the tobacco monopoly was similar to that of Central America's. Like the other monopolies of the new world, the monopoly in Central America created its districts to closely resemble political divisions within the Kingdom. Each monopoly district contained a *factoría* (administrative post and warehouse), where regional managers called *factors* administered the tobacco monopoly. Initially, Nicaragua had two *factorías*, one in the capital of León, and the other in Granada.<sup>275</sup> As mentioned above, most of Nicaragua's tobacco came from Costa Rica. After the Costa Rican growers transported the tobacco to Nicaragua by mule, it was then placed in large government warehouses where workers dried it. Officials then took the tobacco to small *fielatos* (smaller warehouses), where

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<sup>274</sup> Deans-Smith, *Bureaucrats, Planters, and Workers*, 67.

<sup>275</sup> Over time, the monopoly established others in the Villa of Nicaragua (Rivas) and Maltagalpa. Costa Rica also had a *factoría* in Cartago, however, it was subordinated to the one in Granada. Fallas, *La factoría de tabacos*, 34, 77.

agents of the monopoly sold tobacco to consumers. The fielatos would either employ laborers (usually women) to roll cigars and cigarettes in the monopoly's warehouses or would contract out the production of the final products to local women who would take a quantity of tobacco home to produce and return with the finished product.<sup>276</sup> Agents then transported the manufactured tobacco (along with dried and cut leaf) to the monopoly's retail stores where it would be sold by licensed vendors. Monopoly accountants recorded financial transactions sent in from store clerks and made certain that each store, warehouse, and district, in the estanco ran a profit.<sup>277</sup>

According to regulations published in 1771, tobacco retailers sold their goods every day, from nine to twelve in the morning and from three to five in the evening.<sup>278</sup> To purchase large quantities of tobacco leaf (usually ten pounds or more), one had to sign a document stating that the buyer would use the tobacco for household consumption and would not sell the tobacco to others.<sup>279</sup> The pre-monopoly trend for tobacco's finished products to be sold to different consumers continued. Pipe tobacco and cigarette sales were most commonly sold to the popular classes, with the poorest segments of the population usually buying cigarettes. Snuff, because of its high price, tended to be purchased by the elite.<sup>280</sup>

Tobacco sold by the monopoly usually fetched 2 to 3 times more than what it would be worth on the market: higher operating costs and the desire of the Crown for the

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<sup>276</sup> The Peruvian monopoly hired women to do piecemeal work from their homes, however, officials soon found that many women would steal tobacco to produce cigarettes to sell on the side.

<sup>277</sup> AGCA A3.13 (5) Leg. 2345, Exp. 34567. Wortman's figures show that only once did the monopoly run a deficit.

<sup>278</sup> Fallas, *La factorá de tabaco*, 63.

<sup>279</sup> This information is recorded in the account books of each monopoly building. For example, see AGCA A3.13 (5) Leg. 2345, Exp. 34567.

<sup>280</sup> Fallas, *La factorá de tabaco*, 23 and Deans-Smith, *Bureaucrats, Planters, and Workers*, 10.

monopoly to remain profitable dictated this arrangement.<sup>281</sup> In years when tobacco or supplies, such as paper used to roll cigarettes, were scarce, the monopoly charged prices 10 times higher than the market value.<sup>282</sup> The higher prices provided a great incentive for all sectors of society to participate in the black market and fostered resentment among the population.

Control over the monopoly was divided between two branches of the royal bureaucracy. The Captain General, the main royal official in the Kingdom of Guatemala, had the power to appoint people to the various posts within the monopoly, while the Junta Superior de la Real Hacienda (Superior Committee of the Royal Treasury) oversaw the day-to-day operations. The general director of the Junta Superior managed the individual factorías. At the same time, the Junta Superior assigned production values for the entire year to tobacco growers, allocated the harvested tobacco among the factorías, set prices, and was in charge creating policies that would prevent illegal trade in tobacco.

### *Problems with the Tobacco Monopoly*

The organization and implementation of the monopoly in the manner described above contributed to undermining the authority of the monopoly in its crucial first years. The problems of weak supplies and high prices established within the first decades of its existence were never fully addressed. Spanish officials continued to consistently underestimate the number of staff, stores, and tobacco that the monopoly would need to operate. More importantly, they also misjudged the amount tobacco that would be illegally grown as well as the number of guards needed to police the countryside. These

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<sup>281</sup> Deans-Smith, *Bureaucrats, Planters, and Workers*, 42.

<sup>282</sup> Monopoly regulations mandated that the paper used for cigarettes come from Spain, most of which came from Catalonia.

miscues damaged the effectiveness of the monopoly by forcing it to charge higher prices, which in turn made contraband tobacco more attractive to buy for the general public.

Filling positions within the monopoly, especially the administrative posts, took several years and partially accounted for its slow implementation and lack of a consistent policy. Nominees often declined the posts or were only employed for a short time.<sup>283</sup> For example, Don Antonio Guerra, who was nominated as factor of the Granada factoría in 1766, declined the post when he found another job. Even the relatively good salaries offered by the monopoly failed to attract qualified officials.<sup>284</sup> Don Juan de Zavala, factor of the tobacco monopoly in Costa Rica from 1784-1786, proved unable to consistently ship tobacco from the Costa Rican plantations to the consumers in Nicaragua.<sup>285</sup> A dearth of qualified officials slowed the formation of an effective, coherent policy. This resulted in increased confusion and inconsistency among the various factors and made worse the already difficult task of establishing an effective monopoly.

Even when individuals came forward to take positions in the monopoly, the tobacco monopoly also proved to be a source for corruption. In 1772, Nicaraguan Bishop Vilchez wrote to Governor Cabello describing the poor management of the local tobacco monopoly under the direction of Francisco Esteban Sánchez de Herrera. Vilchez accused Esteban, also León's regidor, of using estanco money to buy poor quality or “unusable”

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<sup>283</sup> See, AGCA A3.13 (5) Exp. 14213. Leg. 762. Fol. 38. Other examples may be found in AGCA A1.39-204. Leg. 1756. Fol. 236; A1. 23 (5) Leg. 4624. Fol. 313

<sup>284</sup> For example, the following are yearly wages for some tobacco officials in 1794: Director (2,000 pesos), Treasurer (1,200 pesos), Factor (1,200 pesos), Treasury official (600 pesos), Scribe (500 pesos). See, Fallas, *La factoria del tabacos de Costa Rica*,. 210.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

(*inservible*) tobacco at low rates and then pocketing the rest of the money for himself.<sup>286</sup>

Although he lacked the authority to remove Esteban himself, the governor eventually persuaded Audiencia officials that the scandalous administration of the tobacco monopoly and Esteban's other misdeeds warranted swift action. The Audiencia officials, using Esteban's 'notorious' status as mulatto and testimonies against him as justification, agreed, and granted Cabello the authority to replace Esteban as both regidor and administrator of the monopoly. Although in this instance officials were able to get rid of problem character, problems regarding the administration of the monopoly remained.

Another difficulty that the monopoly faced in the first decades of operation was the absence of stores, warehouses, and factorías in many areas of Central America. Entire towns and regions were dozens of miles away from administrative centers where their residents could legally purchase tobacco. Building administrative centers and distribution warehouses, along with systematizing a schedule of deliveries of tobacco and raw goods, took several years.<sup>287</sup>

A further problem stemmed from a lack of tobacco available at the monopoly's stores. Despite Spanish government experience in importing and exporting tobacco in the 1750s and 1760s, the monopoly during this time never had enough tobacco from its legitimate growers on hand to sell to its many consumers.<sup>288</sup> Although the conditions improved by the 1780s, the tobacco monopoly never maintained adequate supplies in its

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<sup>286</sup> AGCA A1 (5) Leg. 119 Exp. 866. Vilchez also accused the regidor of placing his brothers and friends in positions of power—usually as alcaldes. The bishop mentioned that Herrera's brothers were known as 'los gordos' and altered the alcalde seat year-to-year.

<sup>287</sup> For example, factoría buildings were not completed in Nicaragua or Costa Rica until the 1780s.

<sup>288</sup> Fallas, *La factoría de tabacos*, 65.

warehouses.<sup>289</sup> The first decade of the tobacco monopoly showed subjects that the government enterprise was woefully unprepared to undertake the task of managing tobacco sales in the kingdom. The lack of employees on hand at the beginning of the monopoly, the poor distribution of stores and warehouses, and the constant underestimation of demand for tobacco created a space where illegally grown and produced tobacco gained a reputation as a viable alternative to the royal estanco because it was cheaper and readily available.

Finally, despite assurances to the public that the monopoly would not raise prices, the costs of the tobacco bureaucracy, rules that limited cultivation to just a few areas, and the desire for profit eventually forced the government to charge prices higher than pre-monopoly levels. The costs associated with building and staffing various buildings throughout Central America ate into profit margins and cost the government several thousands of pesos in its first year. Subsequent years saw increased costs averaging nearly 2,000 pesos a year in the monopoly's first decade. In 1766, the first full year of the monopoly, total costs amounted to nearly 46,000 pesos for the entire Kingdom of Guatemala. Five years later, costs had increased to 63,718 pesos.<sup>290</sup> While most of this money went to purchase tobacco and pay laborers as the amount of tobacco sales increased, administrative expenses also went up as the monopoly hired more staff and built additional buildings.<sup>291</sup> Transportation costs stemming from the regionalized

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<sup>289</sup> In 1812, for example, residents of Nueva Segovia complained that the tobacco received from Costa Rica did not fulfill their needs (it was poor quality) and indicated that the problem was a long-standing one. AGCA A 3.13 (5) Leg. 433, Exp 3242.

<sup>290</sup> The first ten years of the monopoly earned a total profit of 340,242 pesos, 6 reales, and 29 maravedís, or about 37,805 pesos per year. In 1770, the monopoly ran at a loss of over 6,000 pesos.

<sup>291</sup> Deans-Smith provides data suggesting that Mexico's costs were much more static for this time period. For example, administrative costs stay at a steady 23% for the first 25 years of the monopoly's existence.

production of tobacco also drove prices up. Transporting tobacco from Costa Rica to Nicaragua, for example, dramatically increased the cost of tobacco when compared to plants grown in Nicaragua. For every 6 arrobas (about 150 pounds) of tobacco that was transported by mule from Costa Rica to Nicaragua, the factoría in Granada had to pay 6 pesos in transportation charges.<sup>292</sup> The desires for profits also influenced the price of tobacco. At the start of the monopoly, tobacco sold for 1/2 to 3 reales, depending on the quality of the leaf. In 1779, this price jumped 25%. The years 1793 and 1804 also saw price increases. The bulk of this increase went not to cover rising costs, but rather to profits.<sup>293</sup> High administration, transportation costs, and profit-taking, increased the price of tobacco and contributed to the monopoly's decision to raise rates shortly after it assumed legal control of the market. The high monopoly prices made it easier for those engaged in illegal trade to sell their wares at cheaper prices as well as encouraged others in enter into the black market. The issues surrounding the implementation and administration of the tobacco monopoly were by no means unique, as other government monopolies generated similar controversies. For example, in 1779, Governor Cabello had to issue an order against the use of fireworks (used for celebrations such as feast days and other holy days) in León because of a lack of gun powder in the royal monopoly's stores.<sup>294</sup>

### *Reactions to the Reforms*

In terms of generating revenue for the Spanish government, the Bourbon

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<sup>292</sup> Muñoz. "El estanco de tabaco", 129.

<sup>293</sup> Miles Wortman, "Bourbon Reforms in Central America", 228.

<sup>294</sup> Cabello also noted the danger of fire in the town as well. AD Gobernacion: Gobierno, 1780-1789, "22 de Marzo 1779, Bando contra cohetes voladores...porque se consumen la pólvora de Real estanco."

reformers achieved moderate success.<sup>295</sup> However, for many residents of Central America, the new economic reforms seemed arbitrary and their implementation provoked criticisms and official complaints. Reaction to the new monopolies and economic reforms (as well as the continuation of older restrictions on trade) also took the form of subverting royal laws and extended to outright rebellion. In some cases, the public's reactions to product shortages, high prices, and other controls produced changes in the ways that the Spain administrated its colonies and demonstrates a pragmatic side of “Bourbon Absolutism”. Whether it was redesigning of how the Crown ran an estanco or hiring more officials to enforce the existing law, Bourbon reformers had to deal with the public's reaction to the changes introduced in the economy.

It is likely that many of the reforms elicited some degree of displeasure from the public—most of which was never recorded. However, some expressed their unhappiness of the new economic reforms in person. For example, on 12 November 1766, regidor Manuel de Batres found an angry mob of twenty men outside of his home Santiago de Guatemala at five o'clock in the afternoon. They presented him with an unsigned letter, voicing their hatred of “the estancos, customs fees, and alcablas” that were the “source and cause of our perdition and misery.”<sup>296</sup> Once he got the letter, Batres hastily retreated into his house and sent off a report warning of the mob and its demands to other Spanish officials in the city. Other reactions to the reforms proved less immediately threatening, but they nevertheless demonstrate the difficulties that Spain had in implementing

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<sup>295</sup> Revenues collected by the Spanish government also benefited from a major economic recovery, new mining strikes, and high commodity prices: all of which added to royal coffers.

<sup>296</sup> AGI, Guatemala, 546. After the confrontation, which Batres remarked as seditious, he went to the President of the Audiencia to inform him of the events. The letter also contained other treats against arming mulattos and some awkward Latin phrases, such as, “*Propter miseriam inopum et gemitum pauperum...*” [The groaning of the needs and the reason of the misery of the poor...]

coherent policies. Perhaps the most frustrating aspect for Bourbon reformers was the resistance from local governments to the new measures, usually through purposeful inaction. The alcalde mayor of Tegucigalpa refused to collect the alcabala in his jurisdiction while the city council of Guatemala City obstructed the implementation of sales tax increases and ignored limits on the number of licensed taverns.<sup>297</sup> Other organizations, such as guilds, also protested the new changes and high taxes. Members of guilds in Guatemala wrote to the king, saying that he was "taking from each individual what is his, by means of estancos, aduanas and alcabalas."<sup>298</sup>

Begrudging toleration and official complaints of government enterprises were common reactions to the economic changes instituted by the Bourbons. However, occasionally the responses went beyond acquiescence or simple protest. In the Audiencia of Guatemala, the violent reactions to the reforms occurred in the town of Quezaltenango, when riots broke out in 1786 with multiple sectors of society (including local elite and indigenous residents) participating. On the surface, the rioters were upset with the limits that the Spanish Crown placed upon aguardiente production in the region. In his study on the establishment of the aguardiente monopoly in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, Jorge González concludes that when Spanish officials encountered determined resistance (both violent and non-violent) from local groups, the officials eventually altered the monopoly's structure to a system that the majority of people in the community found more acceptable in order to preserve the profits that the monopoly brought to the

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<sup>297</sup> For example, the Alcalde Mayor of Tegucigalpa chose not to collect any of the alcabala from the time arrived in office in 1769. Wortman, pp. 230-232. See also, Dym, *From Sovereign Villiages*, p. 48.

<sup>298</sup> Wortman, p. 229

government.<sup>299</sup> Elsewhere, Spain faced more difficulties in running royal monopolies. The Philippines, Nueva Granada, and Peru all experienced violent protests against the tobacco monopoly and other government programs. Opposition to the tobacco monopoly may have led to its repeal in 1791 in Peru and complaints about the new royal monopolies and higher taxes helped ignite the Comunero Revolt in Nueva Granada in 1781.<sup>300</sup>

The Bourbon reforms also opened the door for greater involvement of illegal trade in the day-to-day lives of Spanish subjects living in Central America. The reforms did not do enough to encourage legal trade and contributed to the creation of new ways for illicit trade to exist. Although the Bourbons attempted a few structural changes to the ways in which European goods arrived in Spanish America, such as opening up colonial ports to other Spanish-held ports, using register ships, and by trying to reduce the influence of merchant monopolies, these actions failed to bring about the changes reformers envisioned, especially in marginal areas of the empire. In Central America, Guatemalan merchants still dominated the system of importing and exporting goods out of the region through their control of local credit markets and through their involvement (either directly or indirectly through family and friends) in the political system. For many living in the Audiencia, the lack of real change in the system of legal trade perpetuated the

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<sup>299</sup> Jorge H. González, "State Reform, Popular Resistance, and Negotiation of Rule in Late Bourbon Guatemala: The Quezaltenango Aguardiente Monopoy, 1785-1807" in Dym, Jordana and Christopher Belaubre, eds. *Politics, Economy, and Society in Bourbon Central America, 1759-1821*, (Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press, 2007).

<sup>300</sup> Catalina Vizcarra, "Bourbon Intervention in the Peruvian Tobacco Industry, 1752-1813", *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 39, (2007) pp. 567-593. Anthony McFarlane, "Civil Disorders and Popular Protests in Late Colonial New Granada" *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol 64 No. 1 (1984), pp. 17-54. Other studies also examine local responses to Bourbon reforms. See David Brading, *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico* (Cambridge, 1971) and Steve Stern (ed.) *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World, 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

reliance on illicit trade as a means to acquire desired goods and export agricultural products. Through the evasion of taxes and regulations, illicit traders could still earn a premium on the products they bought and sold; whether it was avoiding taxes or cultivating and selling illegally grown tobacco.<sup>301</sup>

### *Attempts to Control Illegal Tobacco*

High monopoly prices and an unreliable supply of tobacco provided incentives for individuals, often at the margins of society, to engage in contraband trade. These individuals grew tobacco and/or manufactured their own cigars and cigarettes and sold it at rates lower than the monopoly. The designers of the monopoly considered that contraband would be a problem, but as with the supply of tobacco, they underestimated the extent to which it would take hold. To prohibit illegal trade, Spanish officials took several steps, such as enacting harsh punishments and hiring guards. The anti-contraband efforts undertaken by the royal monopoly, however, were not adequate to face the challenges that arose from implementing and running a monopoly. Instead, they focused on the capture and punishment of people engaged in contraband while downplaying improvement of the overall service of the monopoly or lowering the price of tobacco. This policy, designed to improve the monopoly's operation and profitability, did little to curtail contraband or gain public support for the state run enterprise.

Tobacco officials underestimated the amount of contraband that would arise from the establishment of the tobacco monopoly and consequently lacked the manpower to pursue those involved in illegal trade. Officials in Nicaragua (with its jurisdiction over

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<sup>301</sup> See, for example, AGCA A3.13 (5) Exp. 19087, Leg. 1047; A3.13 (5) Exp. 34082, Leg. 2301; A3.4 (5) Exp. 849, Leg. 134; A3.4 (5), Exp. 871, Leg. 135; A3.4 (5), Exp. 897, Leg. 136; A3.4 (5) Exp. 895, Leg. 135; A3.13 Leg. 445; A3.13 (5) Exp. 3331, Leg. 442 and A3.13 (5), Exp. 3747, Leg. 492.

Costa Rica) originally employed only 12 men to combat the illegal trade in tobacco, protect shipments, and to guard plantations in an area of over 170,000 square kilometers.<sup>302</sup> The Spanish government hired these armed men to stand guard outside licensed tobacco plantations during harvest and to roam the kingdom in search of clandestinely grown tobacco. The guards stationed at plantations had two tasks. First, they ensured that as the tobacco became ready to harvest, unauthorized people did not raid the fields, harvest the tobacco, and sell it on the black market. Their other task was to see that growers destroyed any tobacco that they grew that exceeded the contracted amount.<sup>303</sup> The tobacco monopoly also employed guards that patrolled the kingdom in search of clandestinely grown tobacco or manned checkpoints along main roads.<sup>304</sup> They had free-reign to confiscate any tobacco that was not legally purchased or produced and to bring the accused before judges.<sup>305</sup> At first, judges imposed harsh sentences on people illegally possessing tobacco: the accused gave up the contraband, were fined twice the value of the tobacco, forfeited the land that they grew the tobacco on (even if it was not theirs), and paid all costs associated with the proceedings (including paying for the guard's commission and for the paper used).<sup>306</sup> If they were unable to pay the fines, the smugglers had to serve time in work details. These measures, however, were seen as too harsh for the majority of cases and were therefore repealed in 1790 in exchange for a

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<sup>302</sup> Fallas, *La factoría de tabaco*, 89.

<sup>303</sup> My estimation using information on the current area of the nations of Nicaragua and Costa Rica provided by the CIA Factbook. Realistically, the guards only patrolled areas under Spanish control, meaning the western halves of both countries.

<sup>304</sup> The guards also protected the administrative buildings. In 1820 some were dispatched to León to guard against robbery. See AGCA A3.13 Exp. 17415, Leg. 934.

<sup>305</sup> A large 'T' with a circle in the middle was branded on to packs of tobacco to signify it was from the monopoly. Fallas. *La factoría de tabaco*, 214-215.

<sup>306</sup> Fallas, *La factoría de tabacos*, p. 180.

smaller fine and the ability to keep their land.<sup>307</sup>

Correspondence from tobacco officials reveals just how unprepared the monopoly was in dealing with contraband. In 1772, tobacco officials in Granada clamored for more money to hire guards because the twelve assigned to the territory were ‘not sufficient’ in dealing with the ever-increasing amount of illegally grown tobacco.<sup>308</sup> Indeed, nearly every year after that, tobacco officials continued to call for more guards as instances of contraband (based on the numbers of tobacco confiscations) rose annually. Unfortunately for the tobacco officials, the disturbing trend of rising rates of instances of contraband continued throughout the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth.<sup>309</sup>

A group whose participation in illegal trade was largely unforeseen was the monopoly’s own workers, guards, and officials. Initially, the tobacco monopoly relied on piece-meal contracting to individuals (usually women). Workers would receive a bundle of tobacco at the monopoly's factory, go to their homes to produce the tobacco products, and then return to the factory with the finished products. Officials paid the workers based on the number of finished goods they brought back. However, workers employed by the monopoly found it easy to use the 'waste' tobacco to make their own products, which they then sold on the side. In response, Bourbon officials tried to centralize the production of tobacco products in royal factories and instituted stiff accounting practices for the

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Fallas, *La factoría de tabaco*, 134.

<sup>309</sup> That does not necessarily mean that illegal tobacco was being produced in greater numbers, but rather greater numbers of guardas volantes (of which there were more every year) could patrol more area, thus being more effective in discovering clandestine fields. See, for example, AGCA A3.13 (5) Exp. 19087, Leg. 1047; A3.13 (5) Exp. 34082, Leg. 2301; A3.4 (5) Exp. 849, Leg. 134; A3.4 (5), Exp. 871, Leg. 135; A3.4 (5), Exp. 897, Leg. 136; A3.4 (5) Exp. 895, Leg. 135; A3.13 Leg. 445; A3.13 (5) Exp. 3331, Leg. 442 and A3.13 (5), Exp. 3747, Leg. 492.

tobacco leaf given to individuals.<sup>310</sup> These attempts, however, failed to restrict the availability of illicit tobacco. Cases of extortion and collusion with contraband groups occurred with some frequency in Nicaragua and Costa Rica.<sup>311</sup> Occasionally, watchmen charged with protecting the tobacco crop conspired with growers by selling the extra tobacco that should have been destroyed. Similar incidents occurred with senior staff as well.<sup>312</sup> The problem was so severe that Don José de Quintana, a respected Creole merchant in Costa Rica, wrote to the factor of Granada with a series of recommendations to improve the operation of the monopoly in 1792. Among his recommendations, Quintana wrote that the monopoly should “maintain frequent vigilance over the guards and judges, suspending any who chooses infidelity over the fulfillment of their functions.” While he did not cite any specific examples, De Quintana seemed certain that the factor knew exactly what he meant—that there was widespread corruption within the tobacco monopoly.

Susan Deans-Smith reminds us that royal monopolies established in Latin America engendered many instances of resistance, negotiation, and acceptance between authorities and popular groups. Deans-Smith argues that the public in New Spain demonstrated adjustment and acceptance as well as hostility and alienation when they encountered the tobacco monopoly.<sup>313</sup> Similar patterns can be found in how people in Central America adjusted to the tobacco monopoly. Judging from the sheer amount of

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<sup>310</sup> Vizcarra, “Bourbon Intervention in the Peruvian Tobacco Industry, 1752–1813”, pp.578-579. Vizcarra and Deans-Smith also highlight the working conditions and different jobs of the largely family factory workers.

<sup>311</sup> Fallas lists 5 different cases of contraband involving tobacco officials in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Pp. 171-172.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Deans-Smith, *Bureaucrats*, pp. 26

legal tobacco sales, it seems that most people, begrudgingly perhaps, accepted the new reality of the monopoly and purchased most (if not all) of their tobacco through the monopoly. Others, however, took part in the black market, either as producers or consumers. Reports filed by tobacco monopoly guards on contraband production in Nueva Segovia suggest that at least some people in the countryside continued their habit of growing tobacco on a small scale to augment their incomes while others bought tobacco illegally when the monopoly's prices increased or its supplies were limited or of poor quality.

### *Counter-Contraband Efforts*

The emergence of new types of illegal trade, such as tobacco smuggling, the continuation of older forms of contraband and tax evasion, and the desire to collect more revenues prompted Bourbon officials to target Central America's long-standing illicit trade problem. Over the eighteenth century, Spanish officials increasingly turned to military forces to not only protect Spain's overseas colonies, but also to combat illegal trade. Indeed, Bourbon officials found that the strengthening of Spain's military across its empire also served the dual purpose of creating a force that could go after illegal trade. Additionally, the Crown gave local governors greater powers to enforce the new economic policies and explicitly included provisions for them to disrupt contraband in all its forms. For example, during his tenure as governor of both Honduras and Nicaragua, Alonso Fernández de Heredia frequently noted in cases prosecuting smugglers that his power as *commandante general* (and governor) extended to: “the provinces of Nicaragua and Honduras with absolute and private [meaning personal] jurisdiction of arms and

against illicit commerce in them [and] in Costa Rica, [and in all] the corregimientos, alcaldias mayores, forts and ports.”<sup>314</sup> Later governors had similar orders and frequently invoked the accompanying powers during contraband cases.<sup>315</sup>

More explicit actions by the military were taken against the menace of illicit trade. Experience had shown that today's smugglers could be tomorrow's invaders. The English and their Mosquito allies, in addition to being notorious smugglers, had attacked Spanish possessions in Central America nearly every decade since the 1650s.<sup>316</sup> By the 1740s, long-term plans began to be drawn up for capture of the English settlements and the subjugation of hostile Indians along the coast. Part of these plans included the provisions to seal off the trade between the English settlements and Spanish Central America. Critical to these plans were the construction of fortresses and the expansion of local militias. Fortifications in Nicaragua were improved and their garrisons increased, watchtowers along river valleys were erected, slaves and local Indians built a new fort at Matina in Costa Rica in 1741 and, most importantly, at Omoa in Honduras in 1752. The forts not only served to protect Spanish possessions from attack, but also served as staging grounds for anti-contraband efforts. From these locations, officials dispatched patrols to search for illegal traders (usually individuals involved in the foreign trade) on

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<sup>314</sup> The title is: “*commandante general de estas provincias de Nicaragua y Honduras con absoluta y privativa jurisdiccion en las armas y contra comercio ilicito en ellas [y] la de Costa Rica [y] sus corregimientos, alcaldias mayores, fortalezas, y puertos*” See A3.6 (5) Exp. 3615 Leg. 476, “Testimonio del despacho librado por el brigadier don Alonso Fernandez de Heredia, Comandante General de las Provincias de Nicaragua y Honduras, ordenando la notificación de ciertos autos seguidos contra don Francisco Herache, acusando de contrabandista”

<sup>315</sup> These powers did not exempt governors from allegations that they too participated in smuggling. Governor Heredia was accused of a long list of charges, including colluding with the corsairs that attacked Granada in 1750, illegally commandeering goods and selling them, and sending goods to William Pitt, the head English representative on the Mosquito Coast.

<sup>316</sup> MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*, and Floy, *Anglo-Spanish Conflict*, document these raids.

land, in dugout canoes, and in sailing ships. These outposts, conveniently, also served to better collect taxes and other customs duties.

The new military facilities and increased duties also warranted the expansion of the military. Some of the calls for new forces explicitly mentioned their role in fighting illegal trade. For instance, the Governor of Nicaragua in 1769, Domingo Cabello, submitted a plan to create four companies of dragoons and one company of infantry to defend the province against attack and safeguard the roads. Cabello had the financial backing and public support of several important people of Granada, including the town's richest merchant Manuel Esteban Solorzano, who described those that attacked travelers and engaged in contraband with the enemy as 'vagabonds'.<sup>317</sup> Solorzano offered to equip two of the companies as long as his son Joaquin de Solorzano commanded them. Additionally, new taxes (*tributo*) would be levied to fund the rest of the expansion. In explaining why the region needed more troops, Cabello remarked that the illegal trade Nicaraguans and Honduras engaged in clearly benefitted the English and their Indian allies more than Spain.<sup>318</sup> Although in this instance Audiencia officials rejected Cabello's request for troops (Audiencia officials noted that 100 troops were recently sent to the fortress on the San Juan River), eventually more troops were positioned in areas frequently used by hostile invaders and illegal traders.

The construction of forts and the increase in Spain's military presence in eastern Central America culminated during the American Revolutionary War (1776-1783) when Spain sided with North American rebels in 1779. Although the battles fought against the British in the Caribbean theater played into the strategic objectives of the overall military

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<sup>317</sup> Solorzano came from the richest family in Granada. AGI Guatemala, 450. "Un Plan para crear tropas en Nicaragua" 15 de Mayo, 1779.

<sup>318</sup> AGI,Guatemala,450 "Un Plan para crear tropas en Nicaragua"

campaign, they also had repercussions for illegal trade in the region. After years of marshaling its resources, Spain launched attacks on English possessions in Central America from Omoa and overland from Honduras. Led by Matías de Gálvez, Spanish forces captured the British-held islands of St. George's Caye (1779) and Roatan (1782), and attacked and briefly took possession of the Black River settlement (1782). The capture of the British settlements, particularly Black River, disrupted the main route that illicit goods took to get into Spanish Central America. However, the long-term effect on illegal trade was negligible. Once Spanish ships withdrew from the region and the militias returned home in 1783 after the Treaty of Paris, there was little to stop British merchants returning to the areas to sell their wares.<sup>319</sup> The military actions taken in Central America parallel those taken in other parts of the Americas, such as Florida, where Spanish forces attacked and dislodged British settlements that both threatened Spanish areas and participated in illegal trade.

Elsewhere in Spanish America, officials experimented with radical anti-smuggling plans. In the Vice-royalty of New Granada Spain allowed a private enterprise financed mainly by Basque merchants, the Caracas Company (*Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas*), to not only monopolize trade in the region, but also to take control of anti-contraband operations.<sup>320</sup> The monopoly granted the company the right to take any illegal cargo they captured as well as full control of the legal trade. Although there is evidence that the company achieved limited success against smugglers based in Curacao, the company's actions did little to stop illegal trade or make European

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<sup>319</sup>Chapter 3 covers these problems. See also, Frank Dawson, "The Evacuation of the Mosquito Shore and the English Who Stayed Behind, 1786-1800" *The Americas* 55:1 (1998).

<sup>320</sup>Roland Hussey, *The Caracas Company, 1728-1784: A Study in the History of Spanish Monopolistic Trade* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934).

manufactured goods more accessible to the local population. Eventually, protests against the company and mounting costs to outfit the company's fleet forced the Crown in 1785 to end the company's monopoly.<sup>321</sup> New legislation also targeted illegal trade. In 1779, the Spanish Crown issued a royal *cédula* demanding that all cargo coming into Central America be inspected at the port of entry by customs officials to make sure that undeclared goods did not come into the region and that legitimate cargo was properly taxed. However, Guatemalan merchants continued to circumvent the law by unloading cargoes at San Tomás, a small port on the Guatemalan coastline.<sup>322</sup>

Older ways to try and ferret out illegal trade continued as well. The Crown still relied heavily on local officials to arrest those involved in contraband activities. Government officials paid especially close attention to Indian communities for signs of illegal trade. Royal orders continued to severely limit contact between Indians and Spaniards (especially merchants, who might deprive indigenous peoples of money or sell prohibited items, such as alcohol) and local officials that engaged in their own corrupt practices had an incentive to limit indigenous contact with the outside world. Denunciations from neighbors, associates, and dependents remained a vital source of information for royal officials as well. In addition to seeking out accusations of wrongdoing, Spain also employed a number of investigators to secretly gather information related to illegal trade. One such individual, José Estévez Sierra, compiled a report in 1776 on the illegal activities of communities along the Honduran coast. Sierra found out, for example, relayed how much certain goods sold for, where the main smuggling routes existed, and that English traders came inland so often that most

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<sup>321</sup>For more info on contraband in Venezuela see Jesse Cromwell, "Covert Commerce: A Social History of Contraband Trade in Venezuela, 1701-1789" Phd. Dissertation, University of Texas, 2012.

<sup>322</sup>Floyd, "Guatemalan merchants" pp.95-96

residents of the town of Sonaguera learned English as children.<sup>323</sup> Spain also continued the long-running tradition of filing official protests with other European governments (especially the English and the Dutch) over the foreign penetration of their markets. Although the foreign governments usually granted assurances that the illegal activities would stop, this diplomatic pressure accomplished little in terms of stemming any illegal trade.<sup>324</sup>

Finally, the Crown resorted to calling upon a higher power to help put a stop to illegal trade. The Spanish Crown instructed the Church to remind the populations that smuggling and tax evasion were against God, as well as king.<sup>325</sup> Although the possibility of eternal damnation might have dissuaded some from illegal trade, the message failed to take hold amongst significant numbers of the population, including the clergy. Reports in the 1740s named several priests living in Honduras as doing “nothing less” than trading with British during and after the War of Jenkin's Ear. Another mentioned how one priest “went to the settlement of William Pitt [Black River] where he met and traded with a Frenchman established there.”<sup>326</sup> Decades later, in 1778, Nicaraguan authorities were called in to investigate the priest of Telica, Manuel de Jesus Castellon, at the behest of the

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<sup>323</sup> AGI, Guatemala, 450 “Ytinerario, y Navegacion, que practique del Orden del M. Y.S. Presidente don Martin de Maiorga en las costas del Norte para el reconocimiento de extranxweros, y noticias conducentes al Real Servicio, 23 de diciembre de 1776.” Also cited in Mack, “Contraband Trade through Trujillo,” p. 48

<sup>324</sup> For example, Wim Klooster demonstrates how ineffectual these protests were on the Dutch merchants based in Curacao in *Illicit Riches: Dutch Trade in the Caribbean, 1648-1795* (Leiden, Netherlands: KITLV, 1998).

<sup>325</sup> In the case detailed below about the priest smuggling tobacco into León, the bishop of Nicaragua noted that the incident reflected poorly on the the clergy, especially since in a recent royal cédula it was explained that bishops and priests should frequently explain to the populace that smuggling was against God, royal interests, and their fellow subjects [...*estando en el dia tan encargado por Su Magestad en su ultima Real cédula, que los obispos zelen este punto, y que sus curas expliquen con frecuencia al pueblo la grave ofensa que es contra Dios el contrabando, en perjuicio de los Reales intereses y de los demas vasallos*]. A1.11.41 (5) Exp. 611 Leg. 76 Title: “Recurso del Pbro. Don Manuel de Jesus Castellon, cura de Quezalaguaque y Telica obispado de Nicaragua sobre revision de los autos que le ha fulminado el Juez Eclesiastico” F. 22v

<sup>326</sup> Both quoted in Wortman, *Spanish Society*, p. 134

bishop. According to the bishop, Castellon was a “smug genius” who smuggled large quantities of tobacco into León via ox carts.<sup>327</sup> It was only after his own parishioners denounced him to the bishop (and after the bishop had Castellon locked up in the seminary in León) that royal authorities became involved.<sup>328</sup>

### *Difficulties in Containing Illegal Trade*

The measures taken by Spain to confront illegal trade ranged from the hopeful and holy to the practical and pragmatic. Yet these efforts failed to seriously address the large-scale, structural problem of importing and exporting goods from Central America. Furthermore, Bourbon plans to increase revenues from the Audiencia of Guatemala through new taxes and monopolies contributed to creating a new class of people who sought to avoid government mandates. The actions taken by colonial officials that tried to make illegal trade less viable also ran into other difficulties that had long plagued Spain’s administration of Central America.

The geographic and demographic conditions of Central America’s eastern zones remained a considerable obstacle during the late colonial period. The bulk of the Spanish population stayed firmly planted along the Pacific coastal plains and central highlands. Bourbon officials tried to address this imbalance by promoting the settlement of its frontier zones in Central America and throughout its empire.<sup>329</sup> Efforts to Hispanicize the

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<sup>327</sup>AGCA A1.11.41 (5) Exp. 611 Leg. 76 Title: “Recurso del Pbro. Don Manuel de Jesus Castellon, cura de Quezalaguaque y Telica obispado de Nicaragua sobre revision de los autos que le ha fulminado el Juez Eclesiastico”

<sup>328</sup>Castellon had something of a sordid past, with many incidents of physical violence against his parishioners, including hitting Indians and slapping one in the face. He also neglected his position—he did not perform any duties for nearly a year—which meant that a *secular* performed the duties, including marriages. Ibid.

<sup>329</sup>David Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

Caribbean shores came after Spain's successful attack on the Black River settlements. In 1787, some 1200 immigrants from northern Spain and the Canary Islands landed at Trujillo in order to populate the region with Spanish subjects. However, the resettlement plan ran into serious food and housing shortages and came under attacks from hostile Indians. Most of the settlers either fled to central Guatemala or remained close to the relative safety of Trujillo.<sup>330</sup> Even communities that considered themselves Spanish continued to have only had marginal links with colonial centers. The expansive and difficult terrain of the region also frustrated efforts to clamp down on illegal trade, as it was prohibitive in both costs and manpower to place guards at every waterway or mountain path.

Spain also had troubles finding competent officials that could be trusted with effectively enforcing royal orders. Despite their attempts to place trusted, Spanish-born, former military men in positions of power, the Bourbons failed to have an effective remedy for corruption or illicit trade, even when they had it on good authority that it took place. An excellent, albeit somewhat outstanding, example of how the continuation of restrictive trade policies and issues of corruption continued to plague Bourbon officials occurred in the port of Realejo in 1775. During the dispute, allegations of corruption and illicit actions were leveled at both the crew of a merchant ship and the local officials in charge of collecting custom duties. The original itinerary of the *Santa Bárbara* (*aliás Temerario* [reckless]) had the ship leaving Acapulco and making its way to a number of ports in South America and finally stopping in Callao in Peru—a trip that usually lasted forty days. The ship's manifest stated that the cargo to be traded in South America

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<sup>330</sup> Frank Dawson, "The Evacuation of the Mosquito Shore", p. 47

included fine leather, hides, and *indianilla* (a sort of rough cotton textile used for cheap, low-quality clothing).<sup>331</sup> However according to the captain and crew, bad weather had pushed the boat all the way to the Galapagos Islands. When the *Santa Bárbara* left the islands, the winds pushed it north, all the way to Nicaragua. When the ship docked in Realejo customs officials found 'Chinese goods' (*géneros de china*) in the cargo hold and detained the ship and its crew on suspicion of illegal trade.<sup>332</sup> An investigation found that the crew had traded cacao for the Chinese goods with one of the galLeóns that crossed the Pacific (*nao de china*) and called in Acapulco. Ultimately, port officials held the ship in Realejo for 107 days. While in port, the crew of the ship had to sell off its 1500 pesos worth of cargo to local merchants, who officials in León had appointed, in order to pay for food and repairs to the ship. According to the crew, the merchants, Juan Marian Sanzon and Manuel del Sol (later replaced by Augustin Sandoval), would only buy the goods at low prices, forcing a loss of profit for the crew members and the ship's owner, Diego Pimientel y Sotomayor.<sup>333</sup> Eventually, the Nicaraguan officials allowed the ship to leave port. The *Santa Bárbara* then made its way to Sonsonate to purchase indigo where customs officials again found inconsistencies with the ship's register and the Chinese goods. The events surrounding the fate of the *Santa Bárbara* were so egregious that the contador mayor (head treasurer) of Guatemala sent the corregidor of Sonsonate, José de Plazaola, to investigate the ship and its past. Plazaola found so many inconsistencies in the ship's register and in the actions of the officials in Realejo and León that he called the

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<sup>331</sup>Guatemala,451 “Dar cuenta de fraudes en el Realejo (Nicaragua) con el Corregidor y Capitan de un Barco que se llama Santa Barbara” 30 December, 1786

<sup>332</sup>Later, the investigator also mentioned that the alleged path that the ship took was suspect.

<sup>333</sup>The merchants paid the following: 5 *reales* per vara of *indianilla* “because they are very ordinary” (*por ser muy ordinarias*); 10 *reales* per each piece of leather; 4 *reales* per hide (they were a mixture of goat, sheep, and cow hides). *Ibid.*

whole ordeal 'repugnant'. His report found that the ship and its captain engaged in illegal trade of restricted goods because Chinese goods leaving Acapulco could only be transported overland (citing a 17 January 1774 real cédula and Law 5, Book 9, Title 38 of the *Recopilación de Leyes de los Reynos de las Indias*). He also found that officials in León and Realejo allowed the illegal trade to occur since they did not seize the Chinese goods. Interestingly, Plazaola was silent in his report about the complaints from the crew of the ship that the Nicaraguan officials had extorted them.<sup>334</sup>

Finally, the costs of effective enforcement proved to be too great for the Spanish to undertake. Indeed, one of the major concerns of the Bourbon reformers was to increase the profitability of their colonies. The huge expenses of constructing forts, raising armies, and creating new bureaucracies eventually needed to be justified. After the Spanish won the right to administer the British settlements along the Caribbean coast, Spain quickly found that the cost of maintaining a large force for strictly contraband duties was not worthwhile. When the British began to reassert themselves again in the region in the late 1780s, they found a diminished force and a Spain preoccupied with other parts of its empire. Moreover, the war effort also proved to be costly, with the Audiencia of Guatemala owing some two million pesos to the other treasuries in the empire—not to mention that the four year conflict used up all of the funds collected from the tobacco monopoly. Thus, money that could have been used for economic development or remitted to Spain was taken by war efforts or the building or upgrading of forts.<sup>335</sup>

### *Conclusion*

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<sup>334</sup>AGI, Guatemala, 451.

<sup>335</sup>Floyd, *Anglo-Spanish Struggle* pp. 106-107

Amiceto López awoke on a September morning in 1817 to unexpected guests. Outside he found six men on horseback, three of them brandishing machetes. When López opened the door to find out what the men wanted, he must have been able to recognize at least two of them, José Bervezena and Juan Argeñal, both whom lived in the nearby town of Palacagüina, located two and a half leagues from the López home. Another man on horseback identified himself as Luis Sánchez, a *guarda volante* (patrolman) of the Royal Tobacco Monopoly. His job as a guard at the royal tobacco monopoly was to patrol the countryside and destroy any clandestinely grown tobacco he found. In addition, Sánchez had the authority to arrest anyone who participated in contraband activities.<sup>336</sup> López, probably knowing that it was futile to try to hide the approximately 6,000 tobacco plants growing in his fields and drying on his property, gave himself up. The isolation his home usually enjoyed enabled López to augment his income by illegally growing tobacco for the black market.<sup>337</sup> In addition to the sale of dried tobacco leaf, López and his family also manufactured cigars and cigarettes. The income from tobacco sales allowed the family to pay taxes and to purchase goods they could not produce themselves. A few weeks later, a judge sentenced López to a month in jail and fined him 75 pesos. Two-thirds of the fine went to cover the expenses of the court and to pay Sánchez. The two witnesses who identified López, Bervezena and Argeñal, received the remainder.

Despite the efforts of Spanish officials to eradicate—or at least curtail—illegal

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<sup>336</sup>See AGCA, A 3.13 (5), Leg. 442, Exp. 3331 “Luis Sánchez to the Factoria de León”, date unknown, October, 1817.

<sup>337</sup> In addition to the rugged terrain, few roads, and limited number of people, vague concepts of the territorial limits of Nueva Segovia led to disputes between government officials based in Nicaragua and Honduras. For example, see the shifting maps of colonial era Nicaragua in, Harvy K. Meyer, *Historical Dictionary of Nicaragua* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1972).

trade during the eighteenth century, the practice continued to thrive, and persisted until the end of Spanish rule. Not only did the old practices of smuggling, tax evasion, and theft continue, new forms of illegal trade emerged as responses to Bourbon strategies to generate increased revenues. Further complicating the picture at the beginning of the nineteenth century was the almost complete penetration of foreign goods into Central America. British textiles, for example, flooded the market to the point where weavers in highland Guatemala had to quit their professions.<sup>338</sup> Indeed, by the time the new President of the Audiencia of Guatemala arrived in Central America in 1818 he noted that the availability of foreign textiles was so widespread that “everybody at my arrival [was] dressed the same—in English articles”.<sup>339</sup>

In 1804, Honduran Intendant Ramon de Anguiano wrote directly to the king, expressing his many frustrations over the region's continued contraband problem. In a refrain similar to several officials of the eighteenth century, the Intendant blamed the residents of Trujillo for freely trading with the British in Jamaica and Belize, the courts for siding with the smugglers, and the Captain General of Guatemala José Tomás y Valle for being unresponsive to his requests for help. In his report, Anguiano provided several examples of how the Captain General and the courts in Guatemala frustrated his efforts to curb smuggling. He alleged that the contrabandistas frequently bribed judges, witnesses, and other employees of the courts.<sup>340</sup> The complaints of Anguiano, much like the reports written by his predecessors a hundred years earlier, had little effect upon Spain's overall

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<sup>338</sup> Wortman, *Spanish Society* pp. 184-185

<sup>339</sup> Wortman, *Spanish Society*, 193. No doubt the existence of British fashions in Central America had a lot to do with the political and material ruptures the region experienced from Spain from 1808 to 1814.

<sup>340</sup>For example, Anguiano writes that the contrabandistas Don Sancho de Llano had bribed his way out of prison and later received his illicit cargo. Anguiano contended that it violated Ley 6, Libro 8 de Tit. 17 of the Recopilación de Indias. AGI Guatemala 857, “Carta del Gobernador Intendente de Honduras Don Ramon de Anguiano sobre el trafico ilícito en Honduras”, 30 September 1803.

attitude on contraband in Central America.

By the mid-eighteenth century colonial bureaucrats had to balance their desires to create a highly-profitable and 'closed' system of trade with the realities of policing and enforcing economic regulations in Central America. The high costs of effective enforcement, rugged terrain, English presence along the coast, and the participation of a wide range of people in the black market negated any limited (and usually temporary) successes of anti-contraband efforts. The occasional military success or the arrest of individual smugglers amounted to little in the overall shape or conduct of commercial exchanges in the larger Atlantic world economy.

### Chapter Three: Shifting Pressures: Bourbon Indigenous Policies in Western Nicaragua

In January of 1791, a state-of-the-art ship sailed into the waters at the Nicaraguan harbor of Realejo. Situated along the main maritime route between Peru and Mexico, Realejo served as a convenient—if little used—port of call where mariners could trade, make repairs, and replenish their stores.<sup>341</sup> However, instead of the usual wines, textiles, and other goods that merchants often sought to peddle in Realejo, the ship, the *Atrevida*, had aboard dozens of enlightened naturalists, scientists, and artists. Its sister ship, the *Descubierta*, had sailed directly to Acapulco from the pair's previous stop in Panama. The *Atrevida*, meanwhile, had sailed along the Central American coast and had orders to stop in Realejo. The Spanish Crown commissioned the pair of identical ships from a Basque shipyard to undertake a voyage, led by Alessandro Malaspina and José Bustamante, to explore and chart areas of the Pacific Ocean and to investigate continuing rumors of the Northwest Passage. Ultimately, the expedition would spend over five years at sea, making stops throughout the Americas, several Pacific island chains, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines.

In the two weeks that the expedition's ship docked in Realejo, naturalists and artists took the time to add to their collection of plants and animals and record new geographic phenomena. José Cardero drew sketches of aquatic life present in the waters around Central America's Pacific Coast. Artist Antonio Pineda and geographer Thaddaus

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<sup>341</sup> For an account of the entire expedition, see David, Fernandez-Armesto, Novi and Williams (eds.), *The Malaspina Expedition, 1789-1794*. Additional information can be found in Donald C. Cutter, *Malaspina & Galiano: Spanish Voyages to the Northwest Coast, 1791 & 1792*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991). Realejo is described in David R. Radell and James J. Parsons, "Realejo: A forgotten colonial port and ship-building center," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (May, 1971), pp. 295-312

(Tadeo to his Spanish crewmates) Haenke, tempted by its proximity to the port, chose to head inland and explore Volcan el Viejo (also known as Volcan San Cristobal). Despite the noxious fumes, the difficult ascent, and a rattlesnake, they reached the top of the volcano, where they heard the volcano produce deafening sounds.<sup>342</sup> Ultimately, they returned to the ships “with a thousand bits of information and with many specific objects in the three branches of natural history.”<sup>343</sup>

In addition to its natural history component, the Malaspina expedition is also known for the ethnographic reports it produced. Along with collecting plants, drawing animals, and recording geographic data, the crew made careful observations about the peoples they encountered. In Patagonia, the crew interacted with native peoples and took notes on their dress, language, and customs. Later, as they searched for the mythical Northwest Passage in what is today Alaska and British Columbia, they would trade with and closely study the Nooka peoples in the San Juan Islands. During their stay in Realejo the expedition’s artists and naturalists also paid close attention to local customs. They recorded certain activities and made sketches of the peoples they came across. For instance, one drawing depicted the style of dress that the mulatta women at the port wore while another recorded a popular dance, which the crew called the “Baile de Realejo” (The dance of Realejo).

In this geographically central, but otherwise isolated frontier of Spain's American empire, one of the ship's artist captured an element of daily life that revealed that despite the new age of enlightenment and reform, centuries-old institutions and communal

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<sup>342</sup> Malaspina expedition papers, 1789-1795, Mss 2814, Folder 177, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, Portland, Oregon.

<sup>343</sup> Donald C. Cutter, “With Tadeo Haenke aboard the "Descubierta"” Online article, 2006 Hamburg: Ametas Publications Hamburg Online Article <http://www.niqel.de/tadeo/cutter.htm>

responsibilities still dictated the course and conduct of daily life. In a sketch named “Dos mujeres tejiendo” (Two Women Weaving), the artist Pineda—who was born in Guatemala—drew two indigenous women weaving large pieces of fabric. The picture demonstrates how a weaver attached a portable loom to a tree and then anchored it to herself using a rope or back-strap in order to provide the needed tension to the device and the fabric. The loom created space between fabrics so that the weaver could weave the bobbin and yarn horizontally through vertical strands of fabric called the warp (likely made from cotton in this case). This ancient, yet effective, form of weaving was used to produce different classes of materials. Using simple rough-spun plant fibers, weavers could make sacks, bags, covers, saddle blankets, sails and other products used in transporting goods—such as indigo or maize—from one place to another.<sup>344</sup> Softer and more delicate fibers and cotton could be dyed and arranged into patterns on these same looms to make textiles that could be worn.

Several communities in Central America, especially in highland Guatemala and Chiapas, became well-known for the textiles that they produced. Weavers often used distinctive patterns so that the textiles (and their wearers) could be easily identified, usually by the community in which they resided. The many uses for woven textiles and the ubiquitous nature of the weaving technology made textile production a staple of daily life. Beyond their many practical uses, textiles also represented an easily identifiable and transportable value-added good. The raw materials and significant labor that went into creating cotton cloth had long been a widely recognized and valued commodity that was compact enough to be transported and traded. These same qualities also made textiles a desired commodity for tribute. Along with foodstuffs, textiles—and the cotton and thread

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<sup>344</sup> Patch, *Indians and the Political Economy*, 159.

needed for them—were long required by authorities (both Indian and Spanish) to serve as tribute. The textiles produced in north-west Nicaragua are not as well known (nor revered) as the textiles of Chiapas and Guatemala. Nonetheless, during the colonial period, western Nicaragua, especially around the Chinandega-Realejo region, was a regional center for the production of cotton, cotton thread, and textiles. Historically, the region also supplied the purple thread known as *hilo morado*, made from the ink of a sea snail (*Plicopurpura pansa*) to local and regional markets.<sup>345</sup> Whatever quality of cloth, it is highly likely that the women Pineda captured in his sketch were producing cloth for part of their communal tribute.

Systems of extracting wealth and surplus labor from individuals and communities have a long history in the southern portions of Central America. Prior to the arrival of the Spanish, the peoples of western and central Central America had organized themselves into communities that ranged from a few dozen to several thousand. As elsewhere in the Americas, systems of tribute developed that extracted goods in the form of foodstuffs, natural resources, and manufactured goods, such as textiles. Other forms of tribute, such as direct labor, also operated during the pre-colonial period. Many of these processes were adopted and then adapted by Spanish colonizers.<sup>346</sup>

As with other aspects of daily life in the late colonial period, Bourbon reformers introduced new policies and attempted to reconfigure tributary and labor relationships

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<sup>345</sup> Robert Patch has reported that Nicaraguan officials collected more than three and a half tons of goods produced by weavers every year. Patch, *Indians and the Political Economy of Colonial Central America*, pg. 104.

<sup>346</sup> MacLeod documents the ways in which Spanish colonizers drew tribute and goods from local peoples in the early colonial period in *Spanish Central America*. pg. 120-142.

through a series of programs, laws, and edicts. This chapter analyzes how local and regional officials in western Nicaragua collected tribute, labor, and taxes from indigenous peoples and communities during this period of significant policy change. The reshaping of these relationships and the implementation of new policies, however, was neither complete nor smooth. Like other areas of the Spanish empire, regional and local officials selectively introduced and enforced new rules governing Spanish-Indian interactions. In the case of Nicaragua, older patterns of abuse and exploitation—coupled with growing populations of all classes—placed increasing demands upon Indian communities of central and western Nicaragua. Moreover, Nicaragua's relative isolation and vulnerability to outside invasion created unique conditions that concentrated power over indigenous peoples in the hands of the governor. This meant that the governor held not only significant political power in the province, but could also marshal economic forces by virtue of managing the economic activities of thousands of indigenous households and dozens of communities.

Even though the royal government in Spain collected less and less tribute from Central American indigenous groups over the eighteenth century—going from providing up to 78.5% of the Kingdom of Guatemala's remittance to royal coffers to comprising only 18.4% in 1805—it still remained an important revenue source for local officials.<sup>347</sup> Not only did the Bourbon reforms fail to stop or stem the types of abuses and exploitation common since the arrival of the Spanish to western Central America, but the new powers granted by the reforms, new political boundaries created as Crown reshaped its New World dispersed province system into more centralized intendancies, additional public works campaigns, and increased demographic and land pressures of the eighteenth

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<sup>347</sup> Patch, *Indians and the Political Economy of Colonial Central America*, p. 32.

century added more layers to an already onerous colonial system. Unlike the indigenous communities located along the eastern portion of Central America, who used Spain's tenuous grip on eastern Central America, the presence of British subjects in that region, and an unexplored frontier to extract major concessions from the Spanish Crown, groups located in the western portions of the Audiencia faced an organized and entrenched system that had for two hundred years worked to tax and exploit native populations. Nevertheless, even though the western portions of Nicaragua were long settled by the Spanish, its proximity to the isolated eastern frontier created conditions where local Nicaraguan military and political authorities had little interference from regional officials in Guatemala. Infrequent and indifferent oversight allowed most complaints to go unanswered or the petitions written off as Indians simply being unwilling to work and lazy.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, Bourbon officials in Spain made repeated—if unorganized—attempts to clamp down on the worst practices of the indigenous tribute and taxation. The impetus for this type of reform was not necessarily to improve the lives of indigenous peoples or make colonialism's demands more palatable. Rather, Bourbon reformers saw the unchecked power of local officials, such as corregidores, as a threat to good governance. Some reformers implemented plans that tried to modify the system, such as disavowing the payment of repartimientos in raw goods or finished materials and instead collecting it in currency, or abolish the system altogether. Other reforms, such as the prohibition on purchasing a royal position directly from the Crown, remained only in effect when convenient. Selling offices resumed when Spain, perennially short on funds, was at war, a condition that was more common than

peace. Furthermore, as will be explored below, these reforms rarely took hold at local levels.

As they had for two hundred years, indigenous peoples—individually and collectively—found ways to escape or lessen the physical and financial burdens of colonialism. Indian communities used well-established methods such as foot-dragging, pitting elements of the colonial system (especially the Church or higher level authorities) against local authorities, delaying tactics, and negotiations to blunt or avoid participation in new Bourbon approaches to tribute and taxation. These ‘weapons of the weak’ allowed many communities to endure, and in some cases thrive, in the colonialism of the eighteenth century.<sup>348</sup> Other individuals fled the economic and physical demands of the system. Still others, often those in positions of power within Indian communities, worked with Spanish authorities to maintain or increase the ways in Indians paid tribute so they could individually profit or maintain power.

For the Indian communities of western Central America, the systems that extracted tribute and other forms of wealth from their households played an outsized role in their lives and dictated many of their day-to-day activities during the colonial period. By the eighteenth century, outright indigenous slavery and the *encomienda* system of the sixteenth century—which had been the easiest and most direct way to access Indian wealth and labor—were replaced by other methods to extract the wealth from indigenous communities: tribute collection and the *repartimiento*.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale University Press, 1987)

<sup>349</sup> Officially, the *encomienda* system was phased out over a period of time by the early eighteenth century. In 1701 the Crown began to take over lands where the *encomenderos* were absent. In 1718, and then again 1721, the Crown abolished the practice in Central America. See Newson, 272.

These systems evolved over the course of the colonial period. Further complicating the matter is the fact that the collection of tribute, the repartimiento system, and direct labor drafts were invariably linked because they all relied upon the same local officials to implement and enforce them. Thus, what occurred in one area of the Audiencia in the sixteenth century under the name repartimeinto could bear little resemblance to a repartimiento in another area of the Audiencia in the eighteenth century. A quick discussion of the differences of these systems is warranted:

### **Repartimientos**

The repartimiento system varied considerably throughout Latin America and even within the Audiencia of Guatemala. The early colonial labor drafts in which Spaniards forced Indians to work for them for periods of time during the year were called repartimientos. The Guatemalan historian José Severo Martínez Peláez wrote extensively about how this early system developed in Central America, becoming legal in 1574, and slowly evolving from outright Indian slavery, created conditions ripe for abuse.<sup>350</sup> Later, due to royal decrees and economic shifts in the colonial system, the early system of the repartimiento dwindled. In its place, a new system, also called the repartimiento, served to compel Indians to work. This new repartieminto authorized local officials to collect raw and finished goods from indigenous communities rather than forcing Indians to directly labor for them. The precise organization of the new repartimiento varied from place to place.

In some locales, local officials advanced credit or money to individuals who would repay this debt at a later date with currency or with goods that they produced at

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<sup>350</sup> José Severo Martínez Peláez, *La patria del criollo*, pg. 331-348

prices established ahead of time. In other districts, local officials compelled or encouraged the purchase of goods they sold to indigenous peoples, who were then obliged to repay inflated values of these goods back to the local official. The result of either version of the new repartimiento was the same. This system ensured that indigenous peoples would produce foodstuffs or goods at above subsistence levels and their indebted status—coupled with threats of force if they did not participate—made certain their continued participation in the system.

Local officials (sometimes called either corregidores or alcaldes mayores—their functions were the same) usually collected the repartimiento.<sup>351</sup> The economic activities surrounding the production and collection of the repartimiento drove the local and regional economies of the colonial world and fueled the Spanish empire. Not only were the corregidores charged with collection of the repartimiento, they were also responsible for dispensing local justice and implementing the rules and policies of the Spanish Crown. According to a number of edicts and rulings, aside from priests and missionaries, the local corregidor was the only other non-indigenous person allowed to interact with Indian communities. Perhaps not surprisingly, the political and economic authority held by the corregidor and other officials (such as governors) created conditions ripe for corruption and abuse. Because no Spanish merchants could sell their wares directly to Indians, corregidores and alcaldes mayores had what amounted to a monopoly over all commercial activities for their jurisdictions.

Moreover, local officials could set prices at their choosing and compel Indians on

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<sup>351</sup> Patch notes that the only real difference between the two posts were the alcades mayores received twice the salary. Robert Patch, “Imperial Politics and Local Economy in Colonial Central America 1670-1770” *Past and Present* No. 143 (May, 1994), pp. 77-107. As will be discussed below, governors and their subordinates also collected the repartimiento.

the threat of fines, imprisonment, or corporal punishment (usually public whipping) to sell their goods below market price or to buy (sometimes unwanted, poorly made, or useless) goods from them at inflated prices. Spaniards who profited from this system justified the low prices paid to indigenous peoples—usually 25 to 50% of their market value, sometimes only 10%—as reasonable due to the risks associated with advancing credit months in advance. Corregidores would then sell the goods that they 'bought' at a steep discount at local and regional markets at the prevailing market price. Depending on the jurisdiction, corregidores could amass thousands of pesos in profit every year from this system. Even in Nicaragua, which was widely considered during the colonial period as a poor, backward location, with some of the least 'productive' repartimientos, corregidores could make four to five thousand pesos a year on the repartimiento alone.<sup>352</sup>

However, not all jurisdictions were created equal. The ones with the highest levels of populations were the most lucrative for corregidores. As described in chapter two, Alonso Peon y Valdes, corregidor of Subtiava found this out the hard way. After nearly two years as corregidor from 1771 to 1773, he wrote to the king to ask for a new position.<sup>353</sup> Not only was he separated by 1500 leagues from his wife and four small children—and physically sick—but his position did not produce enough money to maintain himself and family.

Tellingly, Peon y Valdes wrote that “no corregidor that feared God’s judgment” and “wanted to be a good servant of the King” could possibly collect enough money legally. To add insult to injury, as he recuperated in León, an earthquake struck the region

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<sup>352</sup> Patch and Newson both discuss the amounts corregidores could achieve over time.

<sup>353</sup> AGI Guatemala,409.

on 29 July 1773, destroying Peon's house and most of his goods.<sup>354</sup>

*Tribute:* Local officials and the Spanish Crown relied upon the collection of tribute as a means to tax Indians. These monies provided the bulk of funding for operational expenses incurred by the Audiencia and paid for much of the Audiencia's bureaucratic and defense-related costs prior to the mid-eighteenth century when the tobacco monopoly replaced it as the most important revenue source for the colonial government. Tribute was assessed exclusively on Indian towns based on the number of indigenous people living in a given community. It was up to local Indian elites to collect tribute from individuals and families. They would then turn over the funds to a local official, who would then forward it on to officials in Guatemala. Tribute rates fluctuated over the eighteenth century, but as Linda Newson has recorded, it usually amounted to between 12 and 24 reales a person in Nicaragua.<sup>355</sup> For most of the eighteenth century, tribute was usually collected in kind—most often corn, wheat, cloth, beans, and chickens. In 1713, the Spanish Crown issued a proclamation for improved profits for the collection of tribute paid in kind. It communicated to local officials to avoid collecting tribute in goods (such as chickens, beans, and honey) when these products are worth less in the market than other commonly produced goods.<sup>356</sup>

Most indigenous communities would have preferred to pay their tribute in coin, but the officials in charge of collecting the tribute from communities (the *corregidores* or

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<sup>354</sup>Ibid. This earthquake was the same one that struck Guatemala and levelled most of Antigua. This event caused the eventual transfer of the capital from Panchoy Valley to the Valley de la Ermita.

<sup>355</sup>Newson states that this rate was low compared to other locations within the empire. Additionally, rates were assessed differently among Nicaraguan sites. In the east, residents of Muy Muy paid only four reales, while other towns along the frontier only had to pay two reales a person. See Newson, *Indian Survival*, 275.

<sup>356</sup>A1.24 Exp. 10224 Leg. 1580

alcaldes mayores) blocked attempts to do so. These local officials wanted to perpetuate the in-kind system of tribute because they were able to manipulate the system. Local officials could set the amount demanded as tribute, sell the tribute on the open market, and then pocket any extra funds that were over the amount expected from the royal treasury from a community. Beginning in the 1740s though, Bourbon efforts to centralize collection and increase the amount paid to the royal government chipped away at in-kind tribute. The king eased the restriction in most locales tribute on collecting tribute in hard currency.

On paper, tributary counts were expected to be accurate and not overburden a community. However, in practice, tributary counts were sometimes decades old and grossly overestimated the number of individuals living in a community.<sup>357</sup> Thus, the tributary burden on many communities—especially the ones where the counts were in arrears—was proportionally much higher than it should have been. When women were excluded from paying tribute in 1754, the Audiencia began to experiment with new ways of assessing the number of indigenous peoples. Instead of relying on head-counts, which could be easily fabricated, oidores investigated parish registers to determine the number of births and deaths in a given locale. In the early nineteenth century, this responsibility was handed over to parish priests.<sup>358</sup>

Indian communities often sought to reduce their tributary contributions in a number of ways and in different circumstances. Individuals who wanted to avoid the payment of tribute could try to flee to nearby haciendas and labor for a period of time for Spanish landowners. Some chose to head to remote locations to avoid Spanish officials.

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<sup>357</sup> Patch, *Indians and the Political Economy of Colonial Central America*, 33-35.

<sup>358</sup> Newson, *Indian Survival*, 274.

These two practices continually frustrated local officials. In 1789, for example, after years of complaints by corregidores stating that to avoid tribute all one had to do was to change their cloths and call themselves ladino, Spanish royal officials attempted to establish a system to determine which people are “truly Indian.”<sup>359</sup> Aside from the order, little was done to implement it and fleeing tributary obligations continued throughout the colonial period.

In times of disease outbreaks or famines, Indian communities petitioned for relief and clemency. For example, Martha Few has explored how communities in Central America could ask for and receive a reduction in their tribute during devastating plagues of locusts.<sup>360</sup> Additionally, Indian communities could also ask for temporary relief from the collection of tribute if they built large public works in their towns. For example, in 1714, Indians from Matagalpa (and Solingalpa and Malaguina) managed to convince local officials to reduce their tribute by a quarter for two years because the communities had just built a church.<sup>361</sup>

### *Labor Drafts*

Direct use of Indian labor in Nicaragua dropped dramatically over the course of the colonial period. In the early colonial period, Indian slavery, encomiendas, and a primitive version of the repartimiento provided the bulk of labor for the Spanish in the sixteenth century. After the 1540s, the Crown restricted the use of Indian laborers to a few permitted instances, mostly in the construction of public works, such as roads,

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<sup>359</sup> AGCA, A3.13 Exp. 4795 Leg. 241,

<sup>360</sup> "Killing Locusts in Colonial Guatemala," in *Centering Animals in Latin American History*, ed. Martha Few and Zeb Tortorici (Duke University Press, 2013).

<sup>361</sup> AGCA, A1.24 Exp. 10225 Leg. 1681. See also AGCA, A1.24 Exp. 10231 Leg. 1587 Fol. 336, which describes how Indians of Posotega, Posolteguilla, Quezalhusque, and Telica got 120 pesos back for building a church.

aqueducts, churches, bridges, and forts. Although their labors were mandatory, the Crown required that local officials pay a ‘just wage’ for the work performed. For example, in the mid-seventeenth century, as Nicaragua faced continuous invasions from pirates, local officials and Nicaragua’s governor mobilized Indians from Nueva Segovia to construct El Castillo de la Inmaculada Concepción along the San Juan River as well as secondary fortifications for the city of Granada. The Audiencia’s Fiscal sent reminders to the Nicaraguan officials that the laborers must be paid.<sup>362</sup> Labor drafts of nearby Indians could also be obtained in a few other instances. A number of appeals in the eighteenth century mention that many Spaniards obliged Indians to do domestic work or labor on their haciendas. Members of the clergy also were found to appropriate the labors of Indians. In 1706, the Franciscan Manuel de Santiago, a vicar in Jinotega, defended his and other Spaniards’ use of direct Indian labors. He explained to officials that not only was it convenient for them to “*repartir*” (used in the old sense of direct labor) Indians of nearby towns to work in domestic duties and other roles in haciendas, but that Indians can “freely serve wherever they would like to” as long as they are paid for their work.<sup>363</sup> Elsewhere in Central America, Honduran mine owners, Salvadoran indigo growers, and other hacienda owners in Nicaragua continued to press officials for greater access to Indian towns in order to use indigenous labor for their own use.

Widely acknowledged as an important institution, the various iterations of the repartimiento system (and other ways that the Spanish extracted labor and tribute from native peoples) has been extensively covered. However, many details of day-to-day operations and the relationship between indigenous officials and Spanish officials are

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<sup>362</sup> A1.24 Exp 10207 Leg. 1563 fol. 161

<sup>363</sup> A3.12 (5) Exp. 3730, 3731, and 3733, Leg. 491

poorly understood. More importantly, few studies extend their period of inquiry to the Bourbon reforms of the eighteenth century. Part of this lack of understanding comes from the regional differences in how the processes functioned and from the policy changes introduced over time. Much of the early work on the repartimiento and other forms of forced labor, such as those done by Charles Gibson and Murdo MacLeod, along with primary accounts from contemporaries like Las Casas and Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán, informed generations of historians about the basics of the system and how it operated through the seventeenth century.<sup>364</sup>

The changes to how the colonial system affected indigenous communities during the eighteenth century has also attracted scholarly attention. Many of these works have examined how indigenous identity was been shaped and defined by these late colonial changes. In her 1987 demographic study of indigenous survival in colonial Nicaragua, Linda Newson argues that after a precipitous decline in the 16th and 17th centuries, the indigenous population of Nicaragua began a slow recovery during the 18th century. Nonetheless, Newson argues that population gains did not come with increased autonomy. On the contrary, political and economic control by local officials over indigenous populations intensified over the 18th century due to reforms introduced by the Bourbons. At the same time, Spanish, mulatto, and ladino populations encroached upon indigenous lands. Newson maintains that despite an overall population increase of indigenous people during the 18th century, Indian cultural and racial identities weakened

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<sup>364</sup> Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810*, Stanford University Press, 1964. Gibson argued that labor shortages, the availability of land, government reforms in the 1620s, and the rise of the hacienda all contributed to the early decline of the repartimiento in the Valley of Mexico. MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*. The primary accounts of Las Casas and Fuentes y Guzmán provided evidence that Las Casas, *A Short Account*. Francisco de Fuentes y Guzmán. *Recordación Florida: Vols. 1 and 2*. Artemis-Edinter, 2000.

in the face of miscegenation, population dispersal, and threats from officials.<sup>365</sup>

Scholars have also shown how efforts to centralize and standardize its empire led to attempts by Bourbon officials to fully integrate Indian communities into the larger Spanish world. Scholars studying other areas of Latin America have expanded the understanding of social and cultural change among indigenous populations. For example, Serge Gruzinski has analyzed religious, material, and cultural transmissions between the Spanish and indigenous communities in central Mexico and notes that native peoples faced increased pressure to fully integrate into society in the eighteenth century. Gruzinski argues that the challenges to native identity and economic independence were met with a complex mix of acceptance and compromise with Spanish culture and religion that allowed indigenous groups to retain elements essential to their ways of life. Some individuals and communities were pulled into the larger systems of regional and world trade while others had only limited engagement with the outside world.<sup>366</sup>

Other scholars have shown that the increasing contact and connections between Indian communities and the Hispanicized world at the end of the colonial period proved to be a temporary condition. E. Bradford Burns demonstrated how indigenous communities constituted an important part of the larger rural population that gained a small degree of independence during the various civil wars of the nineteenth century that were waged between various Conservative and Liberal factions in Nicaragua by simply not participating.<sup>367</sup> In his study of how Liberal governments constructed a national history around the myth of mestizaje (racial and cultural mixing) from 1880 to 1965,

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<sup>365</sup> Newson, *Indian Survival in Colonial Nicaragua*.

<sup>366</sup> Serge Gruzinski, *The Conquest of Mexico: The Incorporation of Indian Societies into the Western World, 16th-18th Centuries*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

<sup>367</sup> Burns, *Patriarch and Folk*

Jeffrey L. Gould claims that indigenous communities relied upon material and cultural traditions to deflect attempts of the nationalist discourse to preserve their way of life.<sup>368</sup>

In his discussion of how Bourbon officials operated in the Andes, Sergio Serulnikov argued that the Bourbon Reforms weakened the authority of provisional magistrates and local officials, including parish priests and Indian leaders. This provoked conflict between regional and local leaders; and local leaders and peasants. Often, imperial officials could find common cause with local actors because they both disliked the power of local civil and ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>369</sup>

Jeremy Baskes, however, suggests that for some Indians, participation in the repartimiento was voluntary and economically rational. He has argued that in eighteenth century Oaxaca, repartimiento provided a critical source of credit for individuals.<sup>370</sup> More recently, Robert Patch has argued that the Central American economy depended on coercion from colonial officials to compel people (mostly Indians) to enter into the local and regional economy. The power wielded by colonial officials allowed them to force Indian communities to participate in the economy through the repartimiento system. Merchants colluded with government officials and aided their efforts by providing capital and access to manufactured goods. Thus, Patch argues, the repartimiento was the lynchpin in economically integrating the Audiencia of Guatemala with the rest of Spanish America and indeed the world by forcing Indians to produce a surplus. Although most of this surplus ultimately ended up in the hands of local officials, Patch contends that—if

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<sup>368</sup> Jeffrey L. Gould, *To Die in This Way: Nicaraguan Indians and the Myth of Mestizaje, 1880-1965*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

<sup>369</sup> Serulnikov, Sergio. "Customs and Rules: Bourbon Rationalizing Projects and Social Conflicts in Northern Potosí during the 1770s." *Colonial Latin American Review* 8 (1999): 245-274.

<sup>370</sup> Jeremy Baskes, *Indians, Merchants, and Markets: A Reinterpretation of the Repartimiento and Spanish-Indian Economic Relations in Colonial Oaxaca, 1750-1821*

one looks past the exploitative nature of the system—it succeeded in stimulating local economies. He also argues that efforts to reform the system rarely worked until the Spanish Crown definitively outlawed the repartimiento in 1786 as the intendancy system was installed in most areas of Central America. Finally, his work demonstrates that when Spain abolished the repartimineto, economic activity in the region declined because local officials could no longer compel Indians to produce a surplus. In the aftermath, most Indian communities reduced their production of a large surplus and reverted to near-subsistence levels.

### **The Shifting Nature of Indian Tribute in a Frontier**

During the eighteenth century, Spain pursued a contradictory and competing set of goals with regard to its indigenous subjects. On the one hand, Bourbon reformers undertook measures to more fully integrate indigenous communities into regional economies and tie them to the Spanish state. They attempted to do this by monetizing tribute, increasing some taxes, removing certain tax exemptions, and by taking steps to dismantle the indirect rule of Indian communities by weakening the power of local Spanish cabildos and Indian alcaldes. On the other hand, Indian communities and Indian labor remained the economic lifeblood of Spain's colonial empire. Moreover, control of Indian labor, through the repartimiento, was the main source of wealth for Spanish officials and their allies.

As Bourbon reformers increased royal oversight of how local officials conducted their day-to-day operations—including their management of indigenous peoples—they became embroiled in local political and economic conflicts over the wealth that Indian labors represented. While the nature of these conflicts were not new—Spanish officials

and colonists had long had difficulties reconciling the twin goals of extracting wealth and protecting Indian communities from exploitation—the new reforms added to the confusion among local and regional Spanish officials as to how to apply the repartimiento.

One did not need to be a Spanish official in order to benefit from the repartimiento. Well-connected individuals also utilized communal labors under the jurisdiction of the repartimiento. In 1780, for example, Doña Andrea Quesada of León, arranged for Indian laborers to work the sugarcane harvest at her sugar plantation. Prior to the harvest, she used a preexisting relationship with the Indian alcalde of Realejo, Antonio Lopez, to ensure that there would be enough workers in the fields to cut and process the sugar. As Realejo's alcalde, Lopez had the authority to select individuals from to community to do work for the Spanish under the powers delegated to Indian alcaldes fulfilling their repartimiento obligations. Unfortunately, the local corregidor was not informed of this particular arrangement until an Indian arrived at the corregidor's residence in a cart with an arm that had been “shattered” by the sugar mill.<sup>371</sup> The corregidor asked for Andrea Quesada to be fined 200 ducados (in accordance with the law), and informed her that she would have to to pay the injured Indian, a man by the name Agustin, a sum of money. If Agustin were to die, then the corregidor ordered Doña Andrea Quesada to pay an even larger sum to Agustin's wife and two children.

Bourbon officials occasionally sought to dissuade improper behavior by local officials by pursuing corregidores that behaved poorly and unethically. In 1759, the corregidor of Realejo, Pedro Sala, brought to the attention of Audiencia officials that the

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<sup>371</sup> “Autos instruidos por el corregidor de la Provincia de Subtiava sobre haverse molido un brazo un Yndio en un Trapiche de Dona Andrea Quesada...” AGCA, A1. (5) Exp. 868 Leg. 119

corregidor of Subtiava, Juan Grau de Cortes, forced Indians to work on sugar mills in his jurisdiction. In his defense, Grau argued that priests and corregidores are allowed to collect ‘contributions’ from Indians. He also noted that it was legal to have Indians voluntarily work on sugar farms, as long as they only performed certain tasks and avoided dangerous work.

Audiencia officials were not convinced. They instructed local priests to remind their Indian parishioners what they can and cannot be ordered to do. Additionally, they ordered the town criers are used to make sure that everyone understands what can and can not be done. In response to Sala’s testimony, the Fiscal reminded Grau that royal law expressly prohibited using Indian laborers on mills. He outlined for the corregidor that for first-time offenders they would lose their office for two years and be fined 200 ducats. The owners of the sugar mills received the same fine and were forbidden to plant sugar for a year. In the same statement, the Fiscal wrote that Indians can *voluntarily* work as sugar cane cutters and transporting the sugar to the mill in carts.

The repartimiento was also a source of conflict and controversy when competing interests vied for control of a lucrative repartimiento. One means of gaining access to the repartimiento was to discredit the current corregidor. Allegations of abuse were also a political tool that various interests could use to attack or discredit their rivals, opening the possibility that they, the accuser, could take over the job.<sup>372</sup> Frequently, it pit two competing groups that were politically connected to different jurisdictions—usually city government and corregidores. For example, on 17 Feb. 1774, José Antonio de la Archauala (alcalde de primero voto) of León overheard the corregidor Juan de la Rocha

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<sup>372</sup> AGCA, A1.2 (5) Exp. 7, Leg. 1 “Queja dada por los aalcaldes ordinarios de León contra el corregidor de Subtiava por palabras ofensivas

say various “unseemly” words against the entire ayuntamiento, all the vecinos, and the royal jurisdiction they represented. Archauala, on behalf of the rest of the ayuntamiento, also took the opportunity to publicly remind de la Rocha of a real cédula that stated that corregidores are not permitted to use the repartimiento de hilados. The public declaration was a clear attack de la Rocha and accused him of improperly using his office to enrich himself. Archauala reported that de la Rocha said that Pedro de Ayerdi—a member of ayuntamiento—was secretive and “wicked.” Miguel Chamorro, priest and dean of the cathedral, testified that while he was at de la Rocha’s home all of a sudden de la Rocha burst out into a tirade against the vecinos of León, that they were “worthless and ignorant pigs.”

Initially, the accusations worked. Officials in Spain suggested that there should be an investigation to determine if de la Rocha used violence, extortion, or prejudice against the Indians of Subtiava or if they voluntarily worked for the corregidor. Governor Cabello approved a “secret inquiry” of de la Rocha. During this inquiry, more testimony was taken from Chamorro, who stated that he witnessed (with Cabeza de Vaca) an outburst “against the honor” of not only the alcaldes, but also without exception to all of the vecinos of the León, regardless of their royal positions.

The attack on de la Rocha’s character also came around the same time (28 February 1773) as José Arechavala and another alcalde from León, Raphael Diaz Cabeza de Vaca, entered Subtiava to try and get local Indians to produce cotton goods for sale in the repartimiento. The two had hoped that with de la Rocha out of the way, they would be free to direct Indians to produce cotton goods for them, rather than the embattled corregidor. However, their presence in the Indian community became known to Spanish

officials. Upon receiving this information, Governor Cabello immediately fined each alcalde 31 pesos, 4 reales, and 22 maravedís for interfering with the affairs of an Indian community.

Later, in the decision by the prosecutor's office in Guatemala, royal officials noted that not only was Cabello right to fine the alcaldes ordinarios, but that he could also arrest them. However, the Fiscal suggested that Cabello handle the matter more delicately. The royal officials tacitly acknowledged that alcaldes throughout the Audiencia frequently needed Indian labor to earn money. The Guatemalan office also noted that Cabeza de Vaca and Arechavala should have followed the rules of subordination and above all la *Buena Política* in their attempt to invade another official's jurisdiction. Later, Cabello raised the fine against the León officials as a further reprimand.<sup>373</sup> After an investigation, Cabello proclaimed that de la Rocha conducted himself well and the charges of his illegal behavior proved to be false.

The most serious case involving competition for indigenous labor came in the 1780s. The case came to light because of a mysterious anonymous letter that arrived at the Ministry of the Indies on 1 November 1783. The letter details the abuses and conditions faced by indigenous peoples living around Masaya, in central Nicaragua, who the letter claimed, were forced to work exclusively for the governor. The letter alleged that the Nicaraguan governors, above all José Estachería, demanded "tribute," (although the process the letter describes is more closely aligned with the repartimiento) and that the Indians were obliged to provide goods that were bought by the Governor's men at very low prices.<sup>374</sup> The letter alleged that the officials who received the tribute profited

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<sup>373</sup> AD Gobernación: Gobierno, 1684-1776. Gobernación 1774.

<sup>374</sup> AGI, Guatemala 413.

greatly from it, especially when the tribute that they received was corn. The governor and his associates were able to amass significant wealth by requiring that the first crop of the season be sold directly to them at the price of 4 reales a fangea. The second harvest they purchased at 8 reales. The governors then would sell it on the markets at 3 pesos a fangea and the second crop at 4 ½ pesos.

The abuse was at its worst, the letter claimed, at the tributary house and the so-called “Casa Real” in Masaya, where indigenous laborers manufactured all manner of things, including furniture, tanning leather, and grinding stones. The governor kept his indigenous workers in barns and warehouses while his officials purchased the goods produced by the Indians at such low prices that when they were sold officials received profits as high as 400%.

It was in this way, the document stated, that Jose Estachería was able to amass a considerable fortune in the two years that he intermittently served in government. The letter also considered that the governor did this “with the knowledge that even if he was dismissed from service he would not be held accountable for his actions” because Estachería was never “officially” given the post. When the anonymous denunciation was investigated in 1788, Estachería was serving as the Captain-General of the Audiencia of Guatemala.

Although Estachería had political connections to the late Minister of the Indies, José de Galvez, the details of the report were confirmed by several people within Nicaragua, including Bishop Juan Feliz de Villegas, and an investigation was launched. The inquiry was beset with difficulties from the outset. Investigators examined other *juicio de residencias* (a trail of an official's conduct while in office), of other Nicaraguan

governors to see if the allegations applied other governors besides Estachería. Governor Cabello's could residencia could not be found. In the words of Jose de Rivera, “it will not be easy to determine when the abuses began or who was responsible for it all.”<sup>375</sup>

At the same time as the investigation into the behaviours of Nicaraguan governors, the ayuntamiento of Granada asked to have the ability to collect a repartimiento on the Indians within its jurisdiction.<sup>376</sup> They argued that when the intendancy system was created in 1786, it included provisions (articles 129-141) that warranted a return the administration of the repartimiento to local authorities. They noted that both the Indian communities and the royal coffers would be best served by local authorities “financing” the distribution and collection of the repartimiento because it would improve the collection of royal tribute while, “avoiding abuse.”<sup>377</sup> The Granadan cabildo also sent along copies of documents from the seventeenth century, which they hoped would demonstrate that the jurisdiction had previously conducted itself well compared to other jurisdictions in Nicaragua.

In a nod to the recent investigations into the activities of the Nicaraguan Governors, the letter also called attention to the fact that the Governors of Nicaragua have used their repartimiento in Masaya to enrich themselves, generating over 20,000 pesos annually. They provided reports stating that the governor’s *tienientes* “obliged the Indians to also participate in the repartimiento, where they produce cotton, wax, cabuya, cure hides, make hats (palm), straw mats, chairs, saddles, reins, halters, cotton cloth...in sum, materials and manufactures that the Spanish, mestizos, mulattos, even the Indians

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid. f.5r-5v.

<sup>376</sup> AGI, Guatemala, 413 No. 11, “Sobre un solícito de la ciudad de Granada de Nicaragua sobre los tributos” 10 December, 1789

<sup>377</sup> Ibid, f. 10.

need.” However the residents of Granada claimed that Indians are rarely paid even half of the amount they are owed.

Earlier accounts also suggested that the labors in Indians in Nicaragua were highly coveted and that Nicaraguan Governors allocated for themselves the most lucrative repartimiento tracts, such as the area from Managua to Masaya. In 1767, Don. Geronimo de la Vega, y Lacayo (the *alcalde mayor* de Tegucigalpa) leveled charges against Domingo Cabello for establishing the “Casa Real” in Masaya.<sup>378</sup> The town council of the Villa de Nicaragua (Rivas) also attempted to expand their jurisdiction into nearby towns so that they could appropriate Indian labors directly.<sup>379</sup>

Indian communities were not passive participants in the disputes over their participation in the repartimiento. The community of Santiago de Tepesomoto in central Nicaragua, for instance, waged at least a 22 year legal campaign against participating in the repartimiento because it had won a settlement in 1703 from the Spanish King that stated that they were not 'obliged' to accept goods and other effects in lieu of wages.<sup>380</sup> Later, in 1779, the community of Matagalpa brought charges of abuse against Nicolas Jicaza, a *teniente* of the governor, during his *residencia* and claimed that the work that they were required to do was not adequately compensated. Indian communities made available all the tools and rhetorical devices at their disposal. For example, in 1780, Matagalpa successfully fought the sale of communal lands to the local *corregidor*, Geronimo Alvarado, by claiming ignorance of the laws and that they were recent converts who did not know any better. The Guatemalan fiscal agreed with their position

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<sup>378</sup> AGI, Guatemala, 545 “*Cartas y Expedientes*” Ano 1767.

<sup>379</sup> A1.2.5 (5) exp. 86 leg. 12

<sup>380</sup> A3.12 Exp. 4103 Leg. 520 (5)

and ordered the land restored to the community.<sup>381</sup>

While anonymous letters and petitions from local ayuntamientos claimed that Nicaraguan governors and corregidores always mistreated and underpaid Indians for their goods, there is evidence to suggest that some within the indigenous communities found the repartimiento beneficial. During investigations of Estachería's behavior as governor in the 1780s and during testimonies recorded during Governor Cabello's tenure in 1769, Indian leaders reported that the repartimientos run by the two governors were beneficial because it saved them from trying to sell excess goods themselves—which was difficult to do because of their legal status as Indians—and because the price paid at the beginning of the season could act as a buffer when harvests were good and prices low.<sup>382</sup> Whether these opinions about the repartimiento were shared by all members of the community is probably unlikely. Indian alcaldes had certain privileges and were generally exempt from participating in repartimientos. They may have also benefited personally from these arrangements.

Indigenous communities also faced other threats to their wealth, land, and well-being that had little to do with official labor drafts or the repartimiento. Many of these external pressures found their way into legal disputes and protests. The community of Subtiava, for instance, brought several suits against residents of León's mulatto barrio, San Felipe, and Spanish hacienda owners in the 1770s. In 1773 the community successfully petitioned the government for compensation due to cattle from the neighboring haciendas and from the mulatto barrio of San Felipe damaging their lands.<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>381</sup>AD, Judicial civil, 1780-1785; Judicial Civil 1780, doc. 4

<sup>382</sup> See Patch, *Indians and the Political Economy*, 161 and 163; and AGI, Guatemala 553.

<sup>383</sup>AGCA, A1.45 (5) Exp. 2936 Leg.445

The trouble eventually forced officials to re-mark the borders between San Felipe, León and Subtiava. Other communities in the 1770s protested that ladinos from Granada cheated Indians on the sale of beef and harassed their women).<sup>384</sup>

Another persistent issue facing Indian communities of western Nicaragua during the eighteenth century, and one that needs further investigation, was episodes of violence and disputes against indigenous groups and individuals by other Indians. The Nicaraguan historian Romero Vargas has remarked that during the colonial period, people from different native communities were “*extranjeros*,” or foreign to one another.<sup>385</sup> Languages split different groups while communal identity made it difficult for one community to sympathise with another. Even within communities, violence and discord among Indians was common place. The same motivations that led to Spanish abuses—greed, lust, honor, drunkenness—also played a role. For example, in 1763 a large brawl took place in the main plaza of Matagalpa between two groups of Indians over a stolen donkey.<sup>386</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Unlike other areas of Spanish America, the administrative reforms in Nicaragua failed to produce the desired effects of increased economic activity (and Crown revenues) among Indians. Despite some success in making Honduran mines more productive and a rise indigo exports, Bourbon reformers did not stimulate economic activity in Indian communities. Moreover, the success with mines and indigo proved temporary. Mines

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<sup>384</sup>This is explored in two related testimonies. See ACGA A3.3 (5) Exp. 3552 and 3553 Leg. 467, “Don Felipe Arguello recalama (se opone) la cancelacion de ciertos derechos que cobra el subdelegado de Masaya, por el remate del abasto de carnes”

<sup>385</sup> Romero Vargas, *Estructuras*.

<sup>386</sup>AM, Caja 8, 1-17, no. 8 “Auto Sobre aberiguar el dueno legitimo de una mula que parecio en poder de Manuel Arteta” 13 de abril 1763

played out and indigo began to be grown elsewhere in the Americas and Asia. Average remittances to Spain from Nicaragua dropped considerably after 1804. Compared to the years 1790 to 1804, when Nicaragua sent on average 32,463 pesos a year, revenues for 1805 to 1819 declined to an average of 18,736 pesos.<sup>387</sup> While some of the decline can be attributed to the disruptions caused by the Napoleonic Wars, other areas of Spanish America did not experience similar drops. The numerous attempt to reform and standardize the collection of funds from Indians in order to increase royal revenues in the eighteenth century did little to produce the desired results. The Spanish Crown continued to tinker with the repartimiento and tributary systems until the end of the colonial period. In 1806, Guatemalan officials reworked the tribute system. They ordered that tribute would be collected directly from the *cajas de comunidad* and as well as levy a two peso tax on every tribute payer.<sup>388</sup>

As the Spanish Crown pursued new funds in the form of mine wealth, commodity exports, the tobacco monopoly, and sales taxes, its local officials, especially in remote areas like Nicaragua, had greater opportunities to enrich themselves. Imbued with the notion that they had the legal authority to compel Indians to work at their will, many local officials—from the *corregidores* and city *ayuntamientos* all the way to the governor—pursued policies that used Indian labors for their benefit.

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<sup>387</sup>Newson, *Indian Survival in Colonial Nicaragua*, 257.

<sup>388</sup>A3.1 Exp. 4937 Leg. 247 fol. 2

Chapter Four  
Borderlands of Colonial Identity:  
Race and Empire along the Atlantic Frontier

On 21 November 1779, representatives of the Church, military, and government of the Audiencia of Guatemala gathered in the Nicaraguan city of Granada for a baptism. The Nicaraguan bishop, Esteban Lorenzo de Tristán y Esmenota, performed the ceremony while Lieutenant Colonel Ignacio Maestre (standing in for the Captain-General of the Audiencia, Matias de Gálvez) served as the godfather. For his new Christian name, the man usually known to the Spanish simply as Yarrince (sometimes Yarrincen or Yarrinse), took the name Carlos Matias Ignacio José Antonio Yarrince. Strategically, Yarrince's new name incorporated the first names of the Spanish King, the Captain General of Guatemala, his stand-in godfather, and the man who successfully recruited Yarrince to the serve the Spanish, Captain of the Conquest, José Antonio Vargas, respectively. After the bishop concluded the Sacrament, Lieutenant Colonel Maestre presented Yarrince with a fine jacket, a hat made from a beaver pelt, and a royal decree that renewed his commission as "Captain of the Caribes." The new gifts complemented the ones he had received some ten years earlier from Spanish authorities, which included a silver-tipped staff, salt, beads, an annual salary, and permission to settle his people in Spanish territory in central Nicaragua.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> There is some confusion about Yarrince's background. Romero Vargas identifies him as a Ulwa Indian while Offen identifies him as Kurka. The confusion also includes the location and date of Yarrince's baptism. Incer *Nicaragua*: (p.376)and Romero Vargas *Estructuras Sociales* (p. 61)and his later *La sociedades del Atlantico de Nicaragua* (p. 238 place Yarrince's baptism in 1769 in León's cathedral. Montiel Arguello, however, has Yarrince's baptism in 1779 in Granada *Nicaragua Colonial* (p. 324). All agree Bishop Esteban Lorenzo de Tristán y Esmenota performed the sacrament and Matias de Gálvez, the

The official presence of government authorities at the baptism underscored the importance of Yarrince's role in Central America. In the eleven years since his provisional commission in 1768, the indigenous forces commanded by Yarrince had successfully reduced the number of attacks on Spanish towns and villages situated in mountainous central Nicaragua. In the time that the Spanish employed Yarrince and his men, only one attack on a frontier town had taken place. In that attack, Yarrince and his men moved quickly to ensure that no loss of life or property occurred. Furthermore, townspeople along the frontier reported a significant drop in the number of cattle thefts.<sup>390</sup> The relative peace and increased security allowed many frontier communities to prosper. Cattle herds, the main export of the area, grew larger and the population of several towns increased. The communities of Matagalpa, Boaco, and Muy Muy took advantage of the peace to extend their communal lands into the previously dangerous mountains. A Spanish official in 1780 noted that the communities had physically moved their town boundary markers and had "excessive lands in the margins of the mountains without royal confirmation."<sup>391</sup> Yarrince's efforts helped to strengthen the minimal (and in some cases helped to re-establish) Spanish presence in a region that had long suffered attacks from Spain's enemies. He also took on official duties as a representative of the Spanish

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captain-general of the Audiencia, is listed as the godfather (Gálvez had a stand-in for the actual ceremony). Since Bishop Tristan was not ordained as a bishop until 1775 and Gálvez did not arrive in Central America until 1779, it seems likely that the date is 1779. Romero Vargas lists his source as BAGC, Año VI, enero 1941, no. 2 pp. 103-115. Yarrince's annual salary was increased to thirty pesos after his baptism. Yarrince is also the subject of a short biography, see Julian N. Guerrero and Lola Soriano de Guerrero, *Cacique Yarrince*, (Managua: Valdez-Valdez & Cia Ltda, 1993). His legacy serves as the basis for a major character in Gioconda Belli's *The Inhabited Woman (La mujer habitada)*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

<sup>390</sup> BAGG, ANO VI, Abril 1941, No. 3 "Consulta del Obispo de Nicaragua de la forma de llevar a cabo la reduccion de los indios caribes que habitan en las montanas de Matagalpa", pg. 195

<sup>391</sup>Vargas, *Las sociedades del Atlantico*, p.240

government. During several occasions, Yarrince acted as an official envoy to the Mosquito King and held negotiations with other Mosquito leaders on Spain's behalf.

Despite the seemingly beneficial relationship that developed between Yarrince and the Spanish, one year after his baptism, the indigenous leader would die from a fever while languishing in a Guatemalan prison, accused of, among other things, being a "deceitful caudillo" and for assisting Spain's enemies in an attack on a fort on the San Juan River.<sup>392</sup> In the wake of Yarrince's capture and death, instability along the frontier returned. Enemy raiders and rebellious indigenous groups attacked settlements at-will, while Spanish efforts to restore order along their eastern frontier floundered for the remainder of the colonial period.

The rise and fall of Yarrince reflects Spain's imperfect and limited ability to navigate the complex social, economic, and geographic spaces of the "Atlantic frontier" during the eighteenth century.<sup>393</sup> This limited understanding of how the region operated forced Spain to rely on people who possessed specialized skills and knowledge of the frontier in order to promote its imperial interests. Traditionally, these groups had been overlooked by royal officials because of their race, social position, or connection to other

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<sup>392</sup>Taken from Incer, *Nicaragua Colonial*, pg.329. See also 8 April 1780 Ingacio Maestre wrote to Matias Galvez

<sup>393</sup>I use the term "Atlantic Frontier" as a shorthand to describe the lands that extend eastward from the central mountain chain in Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica to the Atlantic coast. While the terms Mosquito Coast, Mosquito Shore, and Mosquitia are often used, their traditional definition generally refers to the coastal areas and waterways of the Atlantic coast populated by the Mosquito peoples, and does not include the interior, nor the eastern slopes of Central America's main *cordillera*. E.G. Squier, another early English-language writer, wrote in 1855 that the term Mosquito Kingdom and Mosquitia refers to only the immediate Atlantic coast and that the various indigenous groups that live in the interior can not be "included in any estimate of the population that is facetiously called the 'Mosquito Kingdom'." pp.365-367. *Notes on Central America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1855). As I demonstrate in this chapter, the interior lands and mountains were crucial spaces in which people from the Caribbean coast interacted from those living along the Pacific plains and central highlands.

imperial powers. Independent groups of Indians, run-away slaves, impoverished colonists, unscrupulous foreign officials, turncoats, and village leaders acted as bridges between European and non-Europeans worlds and became crucial to Spain's project of extending its control over the entire Central American isthmus. At the same time, the British, who had small settlements along the Atlantic coast, also actively recruited these same populations to promote its own economic and imperial interests. Although the European imperial powers went to great lengths to formalize its relationship with these go-betweens through trade, giving gifts, handing out commissions, performing ceremonies, and promising land, the unique nature of the Atlantic frontier allowed these go-betweens considerable latitude in their actions, sometimes to the eventual detriment of their European employers. Moreover, rather than just mere agents of empire, these individuals carved out their own space that made use of their official relationships with imperial authorities as well as through activities that remained independent of European plans.

Spanish desires to formalize, expand, and defend official boundaries and space during the Bourbon period touched the lives of all that lived in the Atlantic frontier. In contrast to policies designed to extract wealth, labor, and tribute as efficiently as possible in areas where Spanish rule and authority was at its strongest, Bourbon policy towards strategically important frontiers reflected the reality that Spain often had little control over the areas and people it claimed. Bourbon reformers believed that the use of gifts, alliances, and other methods had the potential to create a more secure and defensible empire while at the same time having the benefit of limiting the costs on the treasury. While the Bourbons still relied upon missionaries, punitive military campaigns, European

colonists, and forced resettlement (*reducciones*) to bring new indigenous peoples and their lands under Spanish rule (and to maintain ones that Spain claimed), these efforts were costly to maintain and limited in their effectiveness. This was especially true for the isolated frontiers far from centers of Spanish authority in Central America. Evangelical missions to the Talamancan tribes in southern Costa Rica floundered for over a century, attempts to convert indigenous groups in the mountainous areas of Honduras (Olancho and Olanchito) and Nicaragua (Nueva Segovia, Chontales, Matagalpa, Sebaco, and Boaco) failed to maintain sufficient ecclesiastical and royal interest, and large-scale military campaigns to subdue hostile Indian groups never materialized.<sup>394</sup> Instead, many Bourbon officials—especially ones that commanded limited resources and those posted to frontier zones—often tried to establish peaceful and accommodating relations with groups that had traditionally remained outside of Spanish influence as a means to achieve strategic, and sometimes personal, goals. At the same time, the arrangements that Spanish officials worked so hard to make and maintain provided opportunities for previously marginalized groups and individuals to take positions of power and authority in the frontier zone.

This chapter examines Bourbon attempts to control the Atlantic frontier in Central America during the eighteenth century by analyzing the lives of those who entered into relationships with Spain, as well as the local authorities that facilitated this exchange.

Both groups traveled from frontiers and borderlands to centers of power in the Caribbean, Central America, Europe and back again in their dealings with imperial authorities. My

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<sup>394</sup>The major military campaigns in Central America during the eighteenth century were designed to defeat and expel the British. Although military planners knew that they would have to fight Britain's indigenous allies, they believed that once the British were gone, the indigenous groups could be either negotiated with or placed by force into controlled and monitored settlements.

research demonstrates that despite attempts to control them, these individuals and groups charted their own paths. Often, this meant that promises of peace or resettlement were soon broken and participation in unsanctioned activities, such as illegal trading or maintaining close ties with Spain's enemies, were common. While Spanish and British documents frequently describe their local administrators, settlers, and indigenous allies in Central America as corrupt, unreliable, and fickle, I argue that this behavior, real or imagined, could serve indigenous groups, go-betweens, and local power-brokers well, as many were able to convert their skills and experiences into economic prosperity and social standing for themselves and their families. This process brought these physically isolated and socially marginalized groups into greater contact with and physically closer to European authorities while at the same time allowed them the physical and social mobility that they often craved.

## **Historiography**

The traditional histories of the Mosquito Coast and the Atlantic frontier during the eighteenth century emphasize how the region served as a minor stage where the imperial rivalry between Spain and Britain played out.<sup>395</sup> Although the region was of marginal economic utility to both the Spanish and British—its main exports being tortoise shell,

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<sup>395</sup>The nineteenth and twentieth centuries also emphasize how the Atlantic Frontier remained a zone of contention. In the early nineteenth century, British informal empire reached new heights along the Caribbean coast, only to be challenged by the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Robert Naylor highlights this later history in *Penny Ante Imperialism: The Mosquito Shore and the Bay of Honduras, 1600–1914 – A Case Study in British Informal Empire* (London: Golden Cockerel Press, 1989) and so does Craig L. Dozier, *Nicaragua's Mosquito Shore: The Years of British and American Presence* (Tuscaloosa, AL, University of Alabama Press, 1985).

sarsaparilla, and dyewood, along with it being a corridor for contraband—the region gained a significant amount of political and military attention because of its strategic value. Historians since the nineteenth century have noted that the Spanish believed that any permanent British presence on the Central American mainland could give the British the ability attack Spain’s larger, more profitable colonies, such as Mexico and Peru. Likewise, the British thought that a presence in Central America would give them access to the Pacific coast and the ability to deny Spain access to other parts of its global empire.<sup>396</sup>

Many historians have viewed the history of the Atlantic frontier as one that was shaped by long periods of neglect by British and Spanish authorities only to be punctuated by a number of small battles set against the backdrop of much larger wars. Perhaps the best example of this would be Troy Floyd’s *The Anglo-Spanish Struggle for Mosquitia*. The over-arching narrative employed by Floyd and others has been to approach the history of the region as one of conflict, where Spain tried desperately (and often ineptly) to recover the eastern half of Central America from British influence beginning in the seventeenth century.<sup>397</sup> After a series of missteps in the early eighteenth century during the war of Spanish Succession (1701-1714) and the War of Jenkin’s Ear (1739-1748), Spain finally achieved its long-running goal of evicting the British during

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<sup>396</sup>The first wide-spread account of this narrative came from Hubert Howe Bancroft’s *History of Central America*, vol. II. Bancroft described the 1780 attempt to capture Nicaragua by the British as “intending to strike a blow at the power of Spain in the heart of her possessions and control the communications between the two oceans.” pg. 609. Earlier accounts, such those from the politician/historian Edward Long, who wrote in the late eighteenth century, can also be seen as part of this tradition. See Edward Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. I (London: 1774), pp. 314- 339, *passim* as well as the American diplomat E.G. Squier’s writings, 1855

<sup>397</sup>Dozier argues that by the eighteenth century the Spanish “became convinced that they must go on the offensive if they expected to prevent attacks upon their frontier and to control the rampant smuggling” Dozier, *Nicaragua’s Mosquito Shore*, p. 16.

the wars of the American Revolution (1776-1783) in a series of climatic battles.<sup>398</sup> These efforts, led by Matias Galvez, marked the highpoint of Spanish power in the Caribbean. Once Spanish forces achieved their goal of eliminating their foe from the coast, Floyd argues that Spanish authority on the Atlantic Coast entered into a period of decline. With the English imperial threat removed, the Spanish tradition of imperial neglect returned. The old and static military leaders the Crown appointed to govern the Audiencia of Guatemala proved unable and unwilling to keep British subjects from returning to the area. This trend worsened as Spanish power on a global scale receded in the 1790s.<sup>399</sup> Several Spanish-language historians, while maintaining that the Atlantic frontier and coastal regions received little interest from the Spanish because there was nothing of value to exploit, also see competition between Spain and England as the main factor in the history of the Atlantic coast and frontier. They argue that the unhealthy climate, remoteness from major population centers, poor soils, few indigenous peoples, and lack of any profitable exports made other locations in Spanish America more desirable and it was not until the English formalized their settlements in the area did the Spanish become interested in the region.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>398</sup>More recently, McNeil, *Mosquito Empires*, has demonstrated that the Spanish defense of their Caribbean possessions largely hinged on mosquito-borne diseases, such as yellow fever and malaria. These diseases afflicted attackers and defenders alike, though Spanish forces generally had greater resistance to the diseases because many of them were exposed as children growing up in the colonies. Yellow fever proved especially lethal to the British forces that captured the Spanish fort on the San Juan River in 1782. The majority, coming from England or the North American colonies, had little natural immunity to the diseases and died in the hundreds, eventually forcing the British to retreat back to Jamaica.

<sup>399</sup>Floyd, *Anglo-Spanish Struggle*

<sup>400</sup>For example, José Dolores Gámez, *Historia de la Costa de Mosquitos* (Managua: Talleres Nacionales, 1939); Enrique Sánchez Pedrote, “El Coronel Hodgson y la expedición a la costa de los mosquitos” *Anuario de estudios americanos*, 24 (1967) p. 1208; and Juan Carlos Solórzano, “La frontera colonial del Istmo de América Central (1575-1800): indios, frailes, soldados y extranjeros en los límites de la

To a lesser extent, missionary activities along the Atlantic coast and the interior provinces have provided historians with another theme. Scholars have assessed the relative failure of these evangelizing efforts compared to other parts of Spanish America. Linda Newson argued that missionary activity in eastern Honduras had largely failed in the early and middle colonial periods for two reasons. First, the indigenous peoples (e.g. the Paya, Jicaque, and Sumus) remained too dispersed for the efficient creation of a mission system. A second, and perhaps related, reason is that the usual material inducements offered to neophytes, such as “belts, beads, and knives,” that normally attracted people into missions failed to work because these items were readily available from English and the Mosquito populations along the coast.<sup>401</sup> Others have examined the rather unsuccessful series of attempts at converting indigenous groups in southern Costa

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colonización hispánica” (*Boletín AFEHC* 2011: 53). The preoccupation with military and religious affairs is quite understandable. Indeed, the copious amounts of military reports and dispatches produced by the Spanish and the British during the colonial period reflect that that imperial officers were deeply interested with military activities. Missionary orders, mainly the Franciscans and Augustinians, also generated a great amount of documentation on their efforts to pacify indigenous groups. For example, the Colegio de Cristo Crucificado, which belonged to the Recollect reformist order of the Franciscans, which was the main apparatus that tried to pacify Costa Rica’s Talamanca region, generated thousands of folios on their attempted “reconquest” of the Talamancan area in the mid-eighteenth century. Compounding this trend of interest in military matters (and to a lesser degree missionary activity) were various Central American journals (e.g., *Boletín del Archivo General del Gobierno*, *Revista del Archivo General de Guatemala*, *Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua*) and presses that were active in the early part of the twentieth century. Many of these journals and presses chose to publish dozens of volumes of transcribed colonial-era documents such as *Colección de Documentos para la Historia de Costa-Rica*, ed. León Fernández, 10 vol. (San José: 1881-1907) and *Colección Somoza: Documentos para la historia de Nicaragua*, 17 vol., ed. Vega Bolañes (Madrid: 1954) that focus on military and missionary activities. Another common theme, especially in English-language histories of the region, is a dependence on British records to provide the bulk of the documentary evidence. Part of this is a reflection of the scattered nature of the Spanish primary sources, as noted by Floyd and Naylor, with documents located in a number of separate archives that stretched from Spain and all of the Central American countries to Mexico and Venezuela. See, Floyd, *Anglo-Spanish Stuggle*, esp. pp. 223-224 and Naylor, *Penny Ante Imperialism*. In comparison, most of the relevant English-language documents are available at an archive in London. Until 2003, these records were housed in the Public Record Office. Now they are housed in the National Archives.

<sup>401</sup> Linda Newson, *Cost of Conquest: Indian Decline in Honduras Under Spanish Rule* (London: Westview Press, 1986), p246.

Rica while Doug Tompson has shown that indigenous peoples feared living in frontier missions throughout Central America because it left them vulnerable to slaving raids by the Mosquitos.<sup>402</sup>

In emphasizing the region as an imperial battleground or a failed site for religious conversion, these accounts have neglected the crucial roles that indigenous peoples and mixed race populations have played in the history of the region.<sup>403</sup> Specifically, these accounts have represented indigenous and mixed race groups as passive participants, or at best, communities caught up in the middle of a Spanish and British imperial conflict. Moreover, these accounts also fail to adequately explain why Spain was never able to consolidate its control of the Atlantic coast after the British abandoned their settlements in the aftermath of the 1783 Treaty of Versailles nor give a good account of what life was like in Spanish frontier settlements or settlements of independent Indians.<sup>404</sup>

One exception to this trend of writing about indigenous peoples as victims has been the ethnohistorical research done on the Mosquito peoples of the Atlantic Coast.<sup>405</sup> These studies mark the myriad ways in which the Mosquito of eastern Central America were able to operate as an independent entity that was both feared and respected by the

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<sup>402</sup> Juan Carlos Solórzano Fonseca, “Indigenas insumisos, frailes y soldados: Talamanca y Guatuso, 1660-1821” *Anuario de estudios centroamericanos* 23:1/2 (1997), 143-197. (Tompson, “Frontiers of Identity”, p. 64-66.

<sup>403</sup> A recent example that departs from this trend for Central America can be seen in Ignacio Gallup-Díaz, “The Spanish Attempt to Tribalize the Darién, 1735–50”, *Ethnohistory* 49.2 (2002) 281-317.

<sup>404</sup> This was not finalized until the 1786 Convention of London Accord.

<sup>405</sup> One of the more interesting (and sometimes confusing) aspects of the historiography on the Mosquitos has been the debates over the group’s historical origins, racial background, and even the use of the term “Mosquito” itself. Part of this confusion lies with evolving ‘modern’ understandings of race and nationality of the populations that call the Mosquito Coast home today and comparing that with historical accounts from the colonial period. Labels used by British and Spanish officials during the colonial period were often vague, inconsistent, misleading, and incorrect. At the same time, the racial demography of the coast was subject to constant change as populations of Africans, Europeans, and different groups of Indians moved into and out of the region. See note 18 for a starting point for scholarly histories of the term Mosquito.

European authorities. In many ways, the scholarship on the Mosquito Coast surpasses that of studies done for the Spanish-speaking parts of colonial Nicaragua and Honduras.<sup>406</sup> The best accounting of the Mosquito Coast during the colonial period comes from the historical geographer, Karl Offen, who has explored how Mosquito groups adapted with changing circumstances and has shown how European ideas about race took on new meanings in the context of Central America's Atlantic coast. He has also provided the clearest recounting of how internal and external forces shaped the development of multiple "Mosquito" identities.<sup>407</sup> Offen and others chart the beginnings of Mosquito history to the arrival of shipwrecked African slaves near Cape Gracias a Dios in the sixteenth century.<sup>408</sup> The subsequent miscegenation that occurred between local indigenous peoples and the shipwrecked Africans produced populations with varying degrees of African parentage. A rise of African-Indians in leadership roles among several Mosquito communities created new markers of differentiation between coastal

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<sup>406</sup> This trend is even more pronounced for the modern period, as many anthropological and linguistic studies have been done. Part of this may be due to the unique history of the Mosquito peoples as well as the direct presence of British, and later US, interests in the region. As a result, the region has attracted scholarly analysis from a decidedly more 'international' crowd than studies of western Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Honduras.

<sup>407</sup> For the colonial period see, Karl Offen, "The Sambo and Tawira Miskitu. The Colonial Origins and Geography of Miskitu Differentiation, Eastern Nicaragua and Honduras," *Ethnohistory* 49 (2002): 319-372 and "Race and Place in Colonial Mosquitia," In *Blacks and Blackness in Central America: Between Race and Place*, edited by Lowell Gudmundson and Justin Wolfe (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 92-129; Karl Offen, "El mapeo de la mosquitia colonial y las practicas espaciales de los pueblos mosquitos," *Mesoamérica* 50 (2008): 1-36; and Karl Offen, "Creating Mosquitia: Mapping Amerindian Spatial Practices in Eastern Central America, 1629-1779," *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 (2007): 254-282. Other scholars, such as Charles Hale and Doug Tompson have also examined the formation of Mosquito identity.

<sup>408</sup> Offen; see also Nicholas Rogers, "Caribbean Borderland: Empire, Ethnicity, and the Exotic on the Mosquito Coast" *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 26:3 (Fall 2002), 117-138; Michael Olien, "General, Governor, and Admiral: Three Mosquito Lines of Succession," *Ethnohistory* 45:2 (Spring 1998); Tompson, "Frontiers of Identity"; and William S. Sorsby, "The British Superintendency of the Mosquito Shore, 1749-1787" PhD Dissertation, London: University College, 1969 for other assessments.

populations that shared a common language.<sup>409</sup> Contemporary observers noted that there existed a population of more “mulatto” Mosquitos and a population of more “Indian” Mosquitos. The Mosquitos living along the northern part of Mosquito Coast, which ran from Trujillo to Sandy Bay, were generally considered to be more racially mixed than those of the southern portion of the coast, which ran south from Sandy Bay to the San Juan River. Over time, the more mulatto populations began to be referred to as Sambo (or Zambo)-Mosquitos while those seen as more indigenous were deemed Indian Mosquitos (modern scholars use the term *Tawira*). Offen raises doubts about how clear-cut this racialized understanding was and suggests that geographic considerations, relations with other indigenous groups, Sambo attempts to politically dominate the more indigenous Mosquitos, and localized experiences with imperial powers ultimately shaped the formation of different Mosquito *groups*. Despite discernible differences apparent to even external observers, both groups referred to themselves as being part of a “nation of Mosquitomen”.<sup>410</sup>

Although Offen asserts that British and Spanish colonial officers knew of the distinction between Sambo and Indian Mosquito identities, many officials failed to recognize them or appreciate the subtleties. In their desires to treat with a singular representative of the Mosquito during the seventeenth century, the British helped establish a “Mosquito Kingdom” in 1687, headed by a King, with his center of power at Sandy Bay. Quickly, and despite extensive support from the British, the British soon realized that the King’s authority among all of the Mosquitos was limited to the lands

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<sup>409</sup>Offen, “Race and Place in Colonial Mosquitia,”p. 95-98

<sup>410</sup> Offen, “Race and Place in Colonial Mosquitia,” p.93

around Sandy Bay.<sup>411</sup> In order to ensure support from all of the main Mosquito groups, the British would eventually convey honorific titles to three other leaders of Mosquito groups. In addition to the King at Sandy Bay, the British recognized a “General” (located in the northernmost district, along the Honduran coast between Trujillo and Black River), a Governor (from Pahra Lagoon to Pearl Lagoon), and an Admiral (Pearl Lagoon to the Río Grande)(See map). These political and diplomatic relations formed the institutional basis for the close ties between British military officers and diplomats with the Mosquito leadership. The connections were further strengthened (and sometimes supplemented) by sustained trade, miscegenation, and close living quarters, as British and other non-Spanish European settlers and traders lived among their slaves, Mosquitos, and other indigenous peoples (free and unfree) along the coast. For example, William Pitt, the founder of Black River settlement on the Mosquito Coast in 1732 and unofficial leader of British subjects in the area for much of the eighteenth century, established close economic ties with the Mosquitos and freed populations of mulattos and mestizos—his ships transported the sarsaparilla and logwood that they extracted to market—as well as interacted with an even wider number of people in his dealings as a trader and smuggler.<sup>412</sup>

Spanish officials, owing to greater geographic distance and fewer personal experiences among the Mosquito, had even more trouble than the British did in distinguishing differences among them. The lack of precision worried certain colonial authorities with some knowledge of how the Atlantic frontier worked. For example, as

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<sup>411</sup> Michael Olien, "The Miskito Kings and the Line of Succession," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 39 (1983), p. 205

<sup>412</sup> Frank Griffith Dawson, "William Pitt's Settlement at Black River on the Mosquito Shore: A Challenge to Spain in Central America, 1732-1787" *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 63:4 (Nov. 1983), pp. 682-683

Spanish officials entertained the idea of reaching a peace agreement with a Mosquito leader in 1769 (detailed below), royal engineer Diez Navarro raised serious doubts about the ability of this particular Mosquito leader to deliver on his promises because Navarro knew that because this leader came from the indigenous Mosquito, he would lack the political authority among the more powerful and numerous Zambo. Navarro also alluded to the long-held idea that the Zambo-Mosquitos had a closer relationship to the British than the indigenous Mosquitos, and thus would be unlikely to join the Spanish in their drive to remove the British from the Atlantic coast.<sup>413</sup>

Not surprisingly, the British and Spanish administrators closest to the Mosquito generally gained enough experience to become familiar with the details between the various Mosquito factions. The elder Robert Hodgson, who became the first British Superintendent of the Shore in 1740, deftly maintained cordial relationships between all the Mosquito groups by frequently traveling between the four main zones of Mosquito control. He renewed diplomatic contact and personal ties to Mosquito leaders by giving them gifts (who then gifted them to their members) and by ensuring that they all had similar access to British traders and their goods.<sup>414</sup> Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Mosquitos achieved a reputation among the Spanish for being capable warriors that had the ability to traverse long distances and hostile terrain to attack their enemies in unexpected places.<sup>415</sup> In 1711, the Bishop of Nicaragua, Benito Garret y Arlovi warned the Spanish King of armed incursions taking place throughout Central

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<sup>414</sup> Sorsby, "The British Superintendency" p.55-112.

<sup>415</sup> Nicolas Rodgers argues that this reputation developed hand-in-hand with other changes in Mosquito life. Rogers comments that frequent Mosquito contact with European traders and corsairs allowed them to develop more permanent locations along the coast. This change also allowed the Mosquito to focus more on acting as middlemen and in carrying out raids. Rogers, "Caribbean Borderland", p119-122

America. He wrote, “They [the Mosquitos] come by way of the mountains and construct canoes, moving over and through rivers like unexpected thunderbolts. Sometimes they appear in Olancho, Trujillo and the lands of Segovia; other times in the region of Chontales, other times in the valley of Matina [in the] province of Costa Rica; and other times by way of the various [and] many rivers, they enter and travel across [the] Lake [Nicaragua].” Governor Hermenegildo de Arana of Honduras, writing decades later, wrote that the “Zambo wolves have famous dispositions and bodies, [and are] capable and robust for every type of difficult labor.”<sup>416</sup> The effective reputation that the Mosquitos developed can be seen in their arrangements to serve the British in other parts of the Caribbean. In 1720, and again in the 1730s and 1740s, the British gave goods, money, and land as inducements for Mosquito groups to come to Jamaica to root out and destroy maroon colonies of runaway slaves that had established themselves in the mountainous areas of Jamaica.<sup>417</sup>

Relations with non-Mosquito groups in the Atlantic frontier proved to be far more ambiguous and fluid than British and Spanish interactions with the Mosquito. Generally, British and Spanish colonial officials usually used the terms Indian/indio or Carib/caribe to describe the different nomadic and semi-nomadic groups that lived inland along clearings near the many rivers that traverse eastern Central America. These populations sustained themselves with a combination of fishing, hunting, gathering, and small-scale agriculture, such as the harvesting of semi-cultivated fields of manioc and plantains that were planted along clearings near waterways. Over the course of the seventeenth and

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<sup>416</sup>Sorsby, “The British Superintendency” p. 146

<sup>417</sup> German Romero Vargas, *Las sociedades del Atlántico de Nicaragua en los siglos XVII y XVIII*, (Managua, 1995), pp. 165-66 and Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica*. p. 335

early eighteenth centuries, Spain mounted several missionary and military campaigns to reduce these populations, but with only a limited and temporary effect, as these missions were usually abandoned after a generation or two. The majority of people living between the Spanish towns and the Mosquito-British-controlled coast remained outside the authority and control of the Spanish (or British or Mosquito). Among the many Spanish terms used to describe the peoples living in the Atlantic frontier were: “indios rebeldes, indios Bárbaros, enemigos, Bárbaros, payas, jicaques, sumu, caribe, woola, and ulwa”.<sup>418</sup> These many names reflected the wide variety of different peoples living in the region as well as European (mis)understandings.

European relationships with these inland groups were further complicated because the Mosquito demanded tribute and targeted them for slaving raids. Floyd, Romero Vargas, and others historians have found that many non-Mosquito peoples fled eastward towards the Spanish frontier, to seek refuge, especially during the 1740s.<sup>419</sup> Ultimately, many of the indigenous slaves that the Mosquito caught ended up working on British plantations in Jamaica and along the Mosquito Coast. Linda Newson reports that by 1750 there were eight hundred in British settlements along the Mosquito Coast alone.<sup>420</sup> The British recognized that the non-Mosquito Indians could be their natural allies against the Spanish but Mosquito desires to extract wealth and slaves from these populations made it difficult for the British to cement any lasting ties or political alliances.<sup>421</sup> From the 1720s

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<sup>418</sup> Several of these terms are obviously different spellings of the same groups, such as woola = ulwa while others were shorthand for describing non-Mosquito natives. The British also identified a number of different groups. Long identifies, “there are many little communities dispersed over the mountains, vales, and plains of the adjacent districts, namely, the Pawyers, Panamakaws, Twakas, Mussues, Woolvas, Ramas, Cuckeras, &c.” Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. 1 pg. 320.

<sup>419</sup> See below, as well as Floyd, *Anglo-Spanish Struggle* pg. 88; Roberts, “Mosquito Borderlands”

<sup>420</sup> Newson, p. 270

<sup>421</sup> Long, *History of Jamaica*.

onward, the British tried to persuade the Mosquito to stop raiding these villages and instead establish more formalized systems of tribute. Not only would this allow the British to develop meaningful political relations with these groups, but it would also allow for the expansion of trade. However, Mosquito promises to refrain from slaving expeditions generally did not last long, especially during wartime, frustrating most relationships with non-Mosquito groups.

In his work on the Atlantic coast, Germán Romero Vargas provides a nuanced approach to indigenous groups living in the Atlantic frontier. His well-documented books, especially *Las sociedades del Atlantico de Nicaragua en los siglos XVII y XVIII*, have demonstrated that the unique geography of the region and presence of the English produced important changes to groups living in eastern Nicaragua. Romero Vargas notes that the formation and evolution of the Spanish frontier came about “very slowly and unequally”.<sup>422</sup> His studies not only analyze the history and social patterns of the Mosquito, but he also examines in detail non-mosquito groups, usually known to the Spanish as ‘caribes’. Although less-studied than the Mosquitos, Romero Vargas argues that these groups played complex—yet critical—roles in the history of the Atlantic frontier. Romero Vargas contends that the Caribes that the Spanish identify can be divided into five groups that each had their own language, culture, and history: ulvas, cucras, sumos (Mayangna), matagalpan, and rama. Doug Tompson has also examined the evolution of the frontier that separated Spanish settlements and those of the coast. He notes that it was not just environmental and geographic boundaries that separated Spanish

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<sup>422</sup> Tompson, “Frontiers of Identity” p.16-Romero Vargas, Germán. *Las Sociedades* pg.23 Romero Vargas also mentions that one method to track the progress of the Spanish frontier could be to trace the penetration of cattle ranching and agricultural cultivation. P. 22-23

settlements from the Atlantic coast, but they were also separated by “ethnocultural boundaries of race, language, lifestyle.”<sup>423</sup> Despite the seemingly well-delineated classifications that researchers have ascribed, the reality of accurately identifying these colonial populations in the existing documentary evidence can be difficult and prone to errors. As Newson suggests, the boundaries between the different peoples of Honduras (and Nicaragua) are difficult to establish “because of the natural blending of cultures at the margins of culture areas and the presence of cultural inliers and outliers within major cultural areas.”<sup>424</sup> Although Newson was referring to Honduras prior to the arrival of the Spanish, her observation can be extended to the Atlantic frontier during the colonial period, as the populations of eastern Central America mixed Spanish, British, Mosquito, Carib, Nahua, and African cultures and traditions.

Bourbon attempts to establish greater control over historically independent groups along the Atlantic frontier echo similar approaches taken in other frontier zones in Spanish America. Historians have long been interested in the study of Spanish colonial borderlands, especially those of North America.<sup>425</sup> Max Moorehead’s profile of Jacobo Ugarte, a longtime governor of northern Mexican frontier provinces, demonstrates how local government officials shifted their positions on interactions with local Indian groups, especially in the wake of changes in imperial policy, such as Viceroy José de Gálvez’s

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<sup>423</sup> Tompson, “Frontiers of Identity” p.15

<sup>424</sup> Newson, *Indian Survival in Honduras*, p. 18

<sup>425</sup>For example, see Herbert Eugene Bolton, *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest* (Hartford: Yale University Press, 1921) and John Francis Bannon *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513-1821* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974) For a detailed historiography of earlier frontier history, see David Weber, “John Francis Bannon and the Historiography of the Spanish Borderlands: Retrospect and Prospect” *Journal of the Southwest* Vol. 29, No. 4 (Winter, 1987), pp. 331-363

*Instruccion* of 1786.<sup>426</sup> The position eventually taken by Ugarte and others in northern New Spain was to try to establish peaceful terms with frontier Indians, such as the Apache, through the use of gifts. Moorehead and others argue that this new policy led to a period of relative peace along the northern frontier. Moorehead suggests that this was an effective and cheap way to gain control over the borderlands, keep competing European empires at bay, and protect the small numbers of Spanish settlers, missions, and presidios in the *Provincias Internas*. Later, as funding declined and changes in leadership occurred, this program, which in practice gave tribute to independent indigenous groups along the frontier, unraveled and fell apart. Perhaps unsurprisingly, when the payments stopped, new waves of raids on Spanish settlements occurred. David Weber continued, and later expanded, the study of this phenomenon. In *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, Weber brought together a number of local studies of Spanish possessions in North America and argued that Spain's actions along its northern border shifted with time and local circumstances and often incorporated indigenous peoples into colonial life in ways vastly different than the French and British empires.<sup>427</sup> Later, Weber added even more complexity to Spanish-Indian relations, by studying Spain's interactions with indigenous groups along its frontiers, from Alaska to Patagonia, in the eighteenth century. He found that while some Spanish officials undertook a policy of "peaceful conquest" by courting autonomous Indians with trade, prizes, and other benefits, other Spanish officials advocated military methods to subdue autonomous or hostile Indians. Perhaps more importantly, Weber also perceives that Spanish 'agents of empire' were not

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<sup>426</sup> Max Moorehead, *The Apache frontier; Jacobo Ugarte and Spanish-Indian relations in northern New Spain, 1769-1791* (Normand, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968) For an overview of Gálvez's time in New Spain, see, Luis Navarro Garcia, *Don José de Gálvez y la Comandancia General de las Provincias Internas del norte de Nueva España* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos de Sevilla, 1964)

<sup>427</sup> David Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

without their own interests and motivation, stating that “...Spain resembled other early modern states, including the US, whose governments could not control their actions of local officials or individual frontiersmen.”<sup>428</sup> Weber’s point, that Spanish officials frequently had their own motives and justifications for their actions, captures a long-held belief that colonial officials, especially those in remote areas, could operate with impunity.<sup>429</sup>

Further studies on borderlands have expanded the vocabulary and categories of analysis that scholars use to describe colonial Central America. Nicolas Roberts adapts Bernard Bailyn’s concept of “marchlands” to describe the Atlantic frontier during the eighteenth century, suggesting that Central America at the time was a “typically disordered border country” where “violence was a way of life.”<sup>430</sup> Though useful, Roberts’ focus on violence as the defining aspect of the region masks the fact that that the contested space of the Atlantic frontier also formed a major contact zone between many different cultures. Multiple indigenous groups, European settlers, Africans, mixed race

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<sup>428</sup> David Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 8-9

<sup>429</sup> Another topic of study long important to historians of colonial Latin America has been the role of the cultural intermediary or go-between. David Weber and Alida Metcalf, among many others, have examined the crucial part that translators, guides, and captives have played in helping European powers colonize the Americas. The go-betweens, translators, and intermediaries that Weber and Metcalf write about possess similar qualities that can be related to the scholarship on space and place. For instance, De Certeau was very interested in the area between one space and another. The individuals and groups analyzed in this chapter acted as bridges between a European 'space' and a non-European space. However, in this process, the individuals in my talk are also creating their own space, since according to De Certeau, “space is composed of intersections of mobile elements.” —the mobile elements being the people themselves. We can also look to Doreen Massey for a further refinement of de Certeau's ideas. In talking about place, she captures the qualities of the Atlantic Frontier. For her, place is composed of 3 inter-related ideas: 1) places have multiple identities; 2) places are not frozen in time, but are processes; 3) places are not enclosures with a clear inside or outside = Space is the product of inter-relations.

<sup>430</sup> Roberts, “Mosquito Borderlands”, p.137, n.12

peoples, and “colonial field agents” all lived in this region.<sup>431</sup>

Although violence and the threat of violence remained a reality for the entire colonial period, episodes of economic cooperation (e.g. legal and illegal trading), personal relationships (detailed below), sexual relations, religious conversion, and the exchange of ideas also shaped the character of the frontier. One way to bridge the gap between the role of violence and cooperation can be seen in scholarship on ‘cattle frontiers’. These studies bring together ideas about governance, agency, violence, and cooperation in borderlands in ways that provide a useful framework for thinking historically about the frontiers in general, and the Atlantic frontier specifically. In one article, Silvio R. Duncan Baretta and John Markoff defined a cattle frontier as having the following five criteria: (1) the area is an economically and environmentally marginal area without large indigenous populations; (2) that central governments delegate authority to individuals and have them pay for the costs of colonization and defense; (3) the area attracts criminals and vagrants; (4) ties are formed between indigenous groups and mestizo communities; (5) and have mestizos serving as mediators.<sup>432</sup>

Another important aspect to consider is *how* colonial powers have conceptualized and dealt with their own frontiers and borderlands in other parts of the Americas. During the eighteenth century, the Atlantic frontier in Central America constituted a ‘middle ground’ between the Spanish and British empires.<sup>433</sup> The Spanish sometimes used the

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<sup>431</sup> For a discussion of how the Mosquito Coast became one of the more complex contact zones, see Baron Pineda, *Shipwrecked Identities: Navigating Race on Nicaragua’s Mosquito Coast* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006). The term colonial field agent is used in Heather Flynn Roller, “River Guides, Geographical Informants, and Colonial Field Agents in the Portuguese Amazon” *Colonial Latin American Review*, 21:1, 101-126

<sup>432</sup> Silvio R. Duncan Baretta and John Markoff, “Civilization and Barbarism: Cattle Frontiers in Latin America” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 20, No. 4 (Oct., 1978), pp. 587-620

<sup>433</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–*

phrase *situado en las inmediaciones de los ingleses* (situated in the vicinity of the English) to describe the locations of peoples living between the British settlements on the coast and the Spanish frontier.<sup>434</sup> Much like the Great Lakes region in colonial North America, no one European imperial power exercised exclusive authority and indigenous people found opportunities to promote their own interests. The Paya of eastern Honduras, for example, both retained their relative independence (although they did give tribute to the Zambo-Mosquitos) and acted as middlemen and suppliers for Spanish ranchers and the English on the coast. While geographical realities placed the Paya between the two European powers, their success as traders came from their abilities to communicate with and traverse the spaces between these two European powers. By the mid-eighteenth century, certain Paya sub-groups (living between Catacamas and Petaste) had amassed over 1,000 head of cattle, several hundred guns, and had access to a host of European manufactures.<sup>435</sup>

The idea of indigenous agency though, was not always considered by contemporary observers. Writing from Jamaica in the 1770s, Edward Long regarded Britain's Mosquito allies simply as a tool which they could use to frustrate Spanish power, "They [the Mosquitos] have always been, and still are, in the place of a standing army; which, without receiving any pay, or being in any shape burdensome to Great Britain, maintains the English in firm and secure possession, protects their trade, and forms an impenetrable barrier against the Spaniards, whom they keep in constant awe."<sup>436</sup> Even when Europeans acknowledged that indigenous groups *could* make choices based

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1815 (Cambridge, U.K., 1991)

<sup>434</sup> For example, A1 (5) Exp. 2473 Leg. 117 AGCA;

<sup>435</sup> Newson, *Indian Survival in Honduras*, p. 274

<sup>436</sup> Quoted in Floyd, *Anglo-Spanish*, p. 67

on their own circumstances, many believed that they did so only because they compulsively needed European help or products, most commonly alcohol. For example, in his experience supervising indigenous wage laborers at the Castillo on the San Juan River, Diez Navarro argued that they were uncontrollable when drunk. In order to better control them, he would offer workers a drink called *zambundia*, which was a mixture of water, sugar and lime.<sup>437</sup> Doug Tompson has shown that European perceptions of people living along the Atlantic Coast were colored by coastal peoples' ability to remain independent of European authority. Thompson argues that because Spain viewed these groups (especially the Mosquito) as adversaries, they often wrote about them in disparaging ways.<sup>438</sup>

Finally, it is important to note that the history of the Atlantic Frontier during the colonial period has cast a long shadow in the post-colonial political history of several countries, most notably in Nicaragua. The failure of Spain to adequately secure the land and control the people of central and eastern Nicaragua during the colonial period weighed heavily on the minds of Nicaragua's political elite during the late-nineteenth century. During the highly charged political climate of that era, Nicaraguan intellectuals looked to the colonial period to find meaning in the past and political justifications for the present. Although Conservatives and Liberals disagreed about the utility and effectiveness of most aspects of Spanish rule in Central America, both sides agreed that Spain's inability to control and colonize the central and eastern portions of the isthmus by

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<sup>437</sup> *BAGG*, ano 5, no. 4, 1940, pg.336 "Autos de la consulta que elevo el Capitan Gobernador de la Provincia de.." p.347

<sup>438</sup> Tompson, p. 25

the end of the eighteenth century continued to weigh heavily on the present. Writing in the 1880s, Conservative historian Tomás Ayón noted that when Nicaraguan governor Melclor Vidal de Lorca resettled a number of frontier towns closer to the west after a series of devastating raids in the 1760s, Spain effectively abandoned central and eastern Central America to the English and their Mosquito allies.<sup>439</sup> Liberal historian José Dolores Gámez—who never failed to point out Ayón's errors—came to a similar conclusion about the region's colonial period: that Spain ceded control of the Atlantic coast and the central regions of Central America to the English and their Indian allies. The difference between the two historians were over what motivated and constrained Spanish officials. For the conservative Ayón, Spain lacked the political will to force the region's inhabitants into the Spanish empire. José Dolores Gámez, on the other hand, found that extensive participation by the region's inhabitants in the contraband trade, “which favors disorder,” allowed the region to remain outside the control of Spain (and Britain).<sup>440</sup> One hundred years later, control of the Atlantic coast continued to remain largely out of the hands of Nicaragua's central government. It mattered little if the Somoza dictatorship, or later the revolutionary government of the Sandinistas, were in power. Both faced similar issues relating to governing the supposedly intractable people who lived in the isolated region.<sup>441</sup>

### **State of the Frontier: Mid-Eighteenth Century**

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<sup>439</sup>Ayón, *Historia de Nica*, tomo II, pg. 56

<sup>440</sup> José Dolores Gámez, *Historia de Nicaragua desde los tiempos prehistóricos hasta 1860* (Managua: El Pais, 1889) pg. 248,

<sup>441</sup> Charles Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction: Miskitu Indians and the Nicaraguan State, 1894-1987* (Stanford University Press, 1994) and Craig L. Dozier, *Nicaragua's Mosquito Shore: The Years of British and American Presence*.

In December of 1766, Spanish officials throughout the Audiencia of Guatemala received ominous news. For the rest of the month and well into January, reports came in, describing how enemy raiders had attacked a number of settlements and towns along the frontier in the Nicaraguan province of Chontales and left a trail of destruction in their wake. Nicolas Serna, captain of war and the *justicia mayor* of the town of Sebaco, reported that early in the morning on 14 December, a force of Mosquito Indians made an *entrada* into the region and attacked the town of Camoapa while everyone slept. According to witnesses that Serna interviewed, the attackers made their way first to the church. Not finding anything of value, they set the church on fire and began to loot and sack the town, burning another eleven homes during the attack. Along with material goods, the raiders made off with fourteen local women before a group of three soldiers forced them to retreat. Serna also informed his superiors that the successful attack on Camoapa had instilled fear into some of the smaller and less organized villages and communities in the area. A Carib Indian by the name of Don Juan told Serna that many residents near the town of Muy Muy had abandoned their homes and fled to the hills.<sup>442</sup>

News of the attacks provoked a variety of reactions among Spanish officials. Chiefly, they feared that further raids could threaten other areas in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Honduras. Responding directly to Serna, Governor Domingo Cabello wrote that “panic spreads when they [residents of the province] hear the name of the enemy so often...it causes dismay whenever they hear about the *indios mosquitos, zambos, y caribes.*” In a letter to officials in Guatemala, Cabello wrote that authorities must “avoid

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<sup>442</sup> A1. Exp. 4826 Leg. 119 “Sobre haber salido voluntariamente en solicitud del Bautismo 47 Indios Caribes de ambos sexos...”, f. 2-3. According to Serna, the attack took place at four in the morning and that it was the arrival of Captain Francisco Altamirano and two soldiers that drove the attackers away. By using the term *entrada*, Serna is most likely referring to the fact that this attack was organized with the express purpose of raiding valuable goods and the taking of individuals for slaves.

and forestall...the spread of dread [*Pavor*] and panic” to other towns along the “unhappy and miserable” frontier, otherwise the tenuous grasp that Spain held in the region was at risk of being diminished or disappearing entirely.<sup>443</sup>

Despite the concerns expressed by Spanish authorities, little direct action was taken by Spanish officials in either León or Guatemala. Governor Cabello sent word to two Spanish officials in the frontier zone, José Antonio Vargas, captain of the militia of San Pedro de Metapa and Captain Teodoro Sánchez Gatica, who commanded a company of soldiers in nearby Acoyapa, to be on the lookout for further attacks. He also promised to visit the region to see for himself how best to defend the frontier. Indeed, the main actions taken by Cabello and other Spanish officials were to express their regret and disappointment that the inhabitants of the region could not properly defend themselves. Spanish officials placed the blame for residents’ inability to stop the attacks primarily on their *calidad*. In Cabello’s letter to Serna, he took to task the residents of Camoapa, stating that, “ it is very sensible for the residents to be surprised [by the attack]...because the Indians of the town are unfortunate [*infelices*] and do not even know how to defend themselves.” Guatemalan officials agreed with Cabello’s assessment that *some* sort of action by authorities needed to take place along the frontier, but made it clear that support from Guatemala would be limited. The *fiscal* added that the residents of the area were responsible for their own defense. He made particular reference to the relatively large number of mulattos living in the region, stating that throughout much of the Audiencia of Guatemala, Spanish officials had freed mulattos from their obligation of paying any tribute or taxes, provided they defend the ports and frontiers. Cabello relayed the fiscal’s

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<sup>443</sup> Ibid., f.2v

concerns to Serna and other authorities in Boaco, Juigalpa, Muy Muy, and Lobiguisca and added that “it is your [members of the local militia] benefit to defend these lands,” because in doing so the militia would also defend “your homes, your lives, your women, and your honor.”<sup>444</sup> In the eyes of Audiencia officials, the responsibility of defending the frontier was chiefly in the hands of the residents and militia that lived there.

Although the royal officials in Guatemala and León seemed worried about the attacks along the frontier, they had no intentions to build large, expensive fortifications, or to dispatch large numbers of troops to defend the area or to arrange a punitive expedition. The inaction was not the result of a lack of volunteers to lead an expedition. Diez Navarro, the viceroy of Santa Fe, and others expressed their desires to lead an expedition to the Mosquito Coast in order to drive the English from their coastal foothold and subjugate their Mosquito allies. The main obstacle to mounting an operation to attack the Mosquito and the British was the fear that any reprisal on the British settlements could lead to a larger conflict that, for most of the eighteenth century, Spain was ill prepared for. A lack of trained troops in the region, few fortifications from which to mount the expeditions from or to fall back to, and not enough ships to transport soldiers also conspired to eternally delay any Spanish attack. It thus fell to local officials to deal with the attacks and threats of further raids in ways that both protected Spanish subjects and extended royal authority while at the same time not provoking a military response from the British or the Mosquito.

### **José Antonio Vargas**

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid., f. 7.

The highest ranking Spanish official nearest to Serna and the 1766 attacks, was José Antonio Vargas. Although he could do little for Serna and the town, some months after the attack Governor Cabello summoned Vargas to León so that he could give a complete recounting of the raid and the Spanish pursuit of the enemy. It was not until 8 August 1767 that Vargas sent word to Cabello that he had been delayed in his departure because of new events along the frontier. After making a brief apology for not being able to come, Vargas reported that on 27 July 1767 a group of forty-seven “caribes” had emerged from the forests to seek refuge and to become Christians. As a way to underscore their sincerity and desires to make this move permanent, the indigenous group had brought with them everything they owned, including all their furnishing and even their grinding stones. Vargas told the governor that he would arrange for them to be instructed in the basic tenants of the faith and settle them along the frontier.<sup>445</sup> Not only would this effort bring salvation to more souls, but it also had the benefit of populating the borderlands with people amendable to Spanish authority.

The task of settling and converting the forty-seven Indians, however, was neither quick nor easy. In the process, and for the subsequent two decades, Vargas would lead Spanish efforts to secure the Atlantic frontier in a region largely devoid of an official Spanish presence. From his hacienda a short distance away from Sebaco, which he called Hacienda Apompua, Vargas became the local face for Bourbon attempts to pacify frontier areas and to secure the empire from external threats. Over the course of his time on the frontier, Vargas would become adept at: making contact and establishing alliances with independent groups of Indians; fostering a reputation among African and Indian slaves that Spain would grant them their freedom and provide them with provisions;

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<sup>445</sup> A1. Exp. 4826 Leg. 119 “Sobre haber salido...” f. 11-20

reporting on the movement and activities of Spain's enemies; and producing maps and creating detailed reports of the area. He would also move to translate his authority into economic and social success for him and his family while also engaging in illegal trade.

Vargas and his family (he was married and had at least one son, Manuel), kept a large compound staffed with local indigenous peoples in an isolated spot along the frontier. Although the details of his life and early career are difficult to ascertain, some years earlier, Vargas had settled in the region after he earned the title, "Captain of the Conquest of Juigalpa." He had distinguished himself during a 1762 Mosquito attack on the Spanish frontier by killing a Mosquito captain and a number of his men.<sup>446</sup> Historians note that *compañias de conquista* were groups of soldiers assigned to help missionaries on their evangelizing missions. In practical terms, Vargas and his company would have provided protection for the missionary should he need it and assist in convincing native peoples (often with the threat of violence) to settle in a centralized location where they could be better preached to and controlled.<sup>447</sup> Although records of his early career have not been located, it is likely he assisted the missionary Ceferino de Cepeda, who established the town of Loviguisca in 1747, beginning in 1751.<sup>448</sup> It is probable that this post was a considerable achievement for someone of his background. The Guatemalan

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<sup>446</sup> Vargas claims that 300 Mosquitos attacked the area and that he led the defense with a mere twenty soldiers.

<sup>447</sup> Romero Vargas, *Las sociedades del Atlántico*, p. 62. Writing in the 1750s, Francisco Ortiz notes the necessity of having armed guards to help missionaries. "Testimonio de la consulta hecha al Superior Gobierno de Guatemala, por el R. P. Fray Francisco Ortiz, Comisario Apostolico de los Colegios de Propaganda Fide Y Visitador de la Cristo Crucificado de aquel Reino, sobre el estado y sucesos de las tres conquistas que tiene a su cargo en las provincias de Comayagua, Matagalpa, y Thalamanca" *BAGC* Vol. 1, No. 3 (1936), 213-256.

<sup>448</sup> The 1751 visita of Bishop Morel de Santa Cruz passed through the Spanish frontier noted that the town of Loviguisca was founded in 1747. AGI, Guatemala, 409 "Meritos de Don Joseph Antonio de Bargas en Nicargua con los indios Zambos Mosquitos" 4 de Marzo 1776. Vargas wrote in September of 1773 that he had completed twenty-two years of service to the Spanish Crown, which would put the beginning of his service in 1751.

bishop-historian Francisco de Paula García Peláez describes Vargas as a *'pardo libre'*, in his mid-nineteenth century history, although none of the extant documents make any explicit reference to his calidad. In 1773, Vargas submitted a *limpieza de sangre y descendencia* that his father had commissioned that should have cleared any suspicion having non-European parentage.<sup>449</sup> Despite his documentation, Vargas was later denied a more prestigious commission because it would be “too much” and “inconvenient”, indicating that his advancement up the Spanish political-military ranks may have reached its limit.<sup>450</sup> Justin Wolfe has shown that many freed people of color in colonial Nicaragua successfully pursued careers in the militia as a means for social advancement while other scholars have also shown that frontier areas offered even more opportunities for people of color.<sup>451</sup>

The forty-seven Indians that travelled to Vargas' hacienda in 1767 came without any warning and spoke no Spanish. Fortunately for Vargas, he had in his employ a local man by the name of Matteo Lopez who spoke their language, which Vargas identified as 'parrasta'.<sup>452</sup> In asking what news they had and why they came in so many numbers, the leaders of the group responded that “they knew that he [Vargas]...was a good man, and

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<sup>449</sup> AGI, Guatemala, 409 “Instancia de Joseph Bargas con Indios de Nicaragua” 22 de Sept. 1773

<sup>450</sup> Francisco de Paula García Peláez, *Memorias para la historia del antiguo reyno de Guatemala*, Vol. III, (Guatemala: Tipografico de L. Luna, 1852) p. 101. The commission he was denied was his own creation. Vargas had proposed that the Spanish Crown create a new gobierno called Tologalpa out of the corregimientos of Sebaco and Matagalpa. The main reason his superiors listed for denying him the position was that the two corregimientos were “too poor” to pay for the expenses, perhaps out of fear of abuse or illegal trade. For details about Vargas' career, see AGI, Guatemala, 409 “Meritos de Don Joseph Antonio de Bargas en Nicargua con los indios Zambos Mosquitos” 4 de Marzo 1776, f. 2-4v.

<sup>451</sup> See his chapter in *Blacks and Blackness in Central America: Between Race and Place* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>452</sup> Scholars have shown that parrasta usually means that they spoke the ulwa dialect of Sumo. Ken Hale argues that the differences are so considerable that they should be classified as separate languages. A1. Exp. 4826 Leg. 119 “Sobre haber salido...” f. 11-13

avored all” and knew that he would protect Christians because they knew of others who had come to him previously. After giving them a cow to slaughter and some corn for the evening, Vargas took an account of the group, which included twenty men, five boys, eighteen women, and four girls. Eventually, Vargas settled them a quarter of a league from his hacienda, at the bottom of a hill and near the banks of a river, so they would have room to plant their crops.

In his efforts to settle the caribes, Vargas reveals several strategies that local officials employed in border areas that were designed to strengthen Spanish authority as well as integrate the new subjects into the Hispanicized world. In his letter to Governor Cabello, Vargas outlined the steps that he had taken with his new charges. The first step was to permanently settle the group. To do so, Vargas loaned the Caribes a number of tools so that they could begin construction on their homes and milpas. Then, Vargas started the much longer and more difficult process of acclimatizing them to Spanish laws, institutions, and society. He began by assigning them an *alcalde* from the group to act as leader. His interpreter Lopez assured Vargas that the man chosen was very bold (*valiente*) and known by everyone in the group. Vargas wrote to Cabello, stating that the chosen *alcalde* would “make sure that they [the caribes] do their work, are obedient, and make their homes and milpas.” The man chosen for the task was given a staff of office and a white hat that once belonged to Vargas in order to emphasize his role as leader. Moreover, as Vargas was also assigning the caribes new names, he had the newly appointed *alcalde* of the caribes take his own name as his own. Indeed, for Vargas, it seems that naming people had real strategic power for both the Caribes as well as for his own political ambitions. Vargas named the other male caribes after other “people of high

distinction in this Kingdom and Province,” including: Pedro Salazar (President of the Audiencia); Juan Gonzales Bustillo, Basilio Villanueva, Manuel Fernandez de Villanueva (members of the cabildo of Guatemala); Domingo Cabello (the current Governor of Nicaragua); Melchor Vidal [de Lorca] (past Governor of Nicaragua); and Juan Vilchez Cabrera (Bishop of Nicaragua and Costa Rica). Vargas tried to establish other ties to the refugees beyond just names. Vargas informed Cabello that he had taken four of the children (two boys and two girls) into his personal care, teaching the two boys how to read and having the two girls learn how to cook. In exchange for this, the children were to serve his family.

Instruction in religious doctrine was also a tool used by Vargas as a means to better incorporate the Caribes into Spanish society, teach them civility, as well as fulfill his own religious obligations. Vargas reported that he would teach all the children the basics of the Catholic faith. The others he left in charge to the interpreter Lopez, who, in addition to teaching them the catechism served as Vargas’ model for how the natives should behave. Although Lopez was Caribe himself, Vargas stressed that he was “very ladino and was of very good manners”.<sup>453</sup> Once informed of the arrival of the Indians, Cabello sent word to authorities in Guatemala to help with the religious instruction. The fiscal commended Vargas’ actions, but cautioned him that trained missionaries would better serve everyone. He noted that, “It is never convenient to found a Pueblito [small town] with so few Indians, because they maintain their barbarous ways and they have less experience with civilization”.<sup>454</sup> Official support from the missionary orders for the religious instruction of the Caribes, however, was not forthcoming. José Ramero, the

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<sup>453</sup>Vargas wrote, “que es un indio muy ladino, y de muy buenas propiedades” Ibid. f. 15v

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., f.24

Padre Guardian of the Propaganda Fide, complained that it would be wasteful to have two missionaries sent to instruct only forty-seven souls and that Vargas had placed the Indian at a location that was the “most exposed to an enemy invasion in all of Nicaragua.”<sup>455</sup> Eventually, local priests from Acoyapa and Juigalpa (some six and three leagues distant, respectively) shared the responsibility of teaching the neophytes.

Vargas’ conduct with the forty-seven Caribes foreshadowed a similar—though more politically delicate—circumstance along the frontier eight years later, in 1775. On 11 November 1775 news reached Vargas’ hacienda that fifteen piraguas had been sighted near some falls a few leagues east of the frontier along the Mico River, in a place that locals called Puerto de Carca. Long a vector for Mosquito raids, the Captain of the Conquest sent off an urgent message to Governor Cabello informing him of the developing situation. Instead of enemy raiders, Vargas instead found a number of “negros revueltos” (rebel blacks) and Carib Indians that hailed from Bocas del Toro (a region along the northernmost Atlantic coast of Panama). All told, some sixty-nine people (thirteen “negros”, five “negras”, twenty-two “negritas” and “sambitas” children, nine Carib men, and sixteen Carib women) had come to the Spanish frontier. Much like the arrival of the Caribs some years earlier, Vargas reported that the leaders of the group asked for refuge and to be taught Christianity.<sup>456</sup>

One member of the group, Lorenzo Garcia, who related to Vargas that he was

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<sup>455</sup> Ibid. f. 28

<sup>456</sup> AGCA, A1 (5) Exp. 2478 Leg. 117, “Diligencias practicadas por el Gov y Com. general de la Prov. de Nica. en consecuencia de haberse yntorducido en el Partido de Chontales pertenezte a la juris. de Granadapor los rios de Canca, y el de Nico, 75 personas entre negros y Indios de todas edades que han benido Huidos de la Poblacion de Don Enrique el Yngles, en busca de la Christiandad para abrazar Nuestra Santa Fe Catholica sobre lo qual se han dado las Providencias que han parecido combenientes.” Although the title says seventy-five people made the trip, only sixty-nine are identified. *Some* of the legajo was republished in *BAGG*, (Tomo 6, no. 1, Oct. 1940) pp. 40-80.

originally from Santiago de Veraguas in central Panama and was the only one who spoke Spanish, explained how and why they had come to the Spanish portion of the frontier.<sup>457</sup> Garcia told Vargas that they were runaway slaves who had fled the estate of “El ingles Enrique” (later identified as Henry Corrin), located in Bluefields along the coast, who had died some years earlier. Garcia mentioned that after Henry had died, two other caretakers had come to oversee the estate, but both of them had also died. Then, someone (Vargas records “El Yngles Chal con aqn” [perhaps Hodgson]) came by the estate and said that since their master was dead and “underneath the ground” they were free, so they left to find Christianity. They had travelled up the Mico Rver system with their meagre belongings, which amounted to seven inoperable guns (they lacked powder and munitions as well), some bows and arrows, twelve axes, and fourteen bowls made out of iron.

In response to Vargas’ news, the governor warned the other Spanish authorities in the region to be on the lookout for any incursions by Spain’s enemies. In a letter to the commander of the militia of Acoyapa, Cabello stated that since it was likely that the formers slaves belonged to either an Englishman or the Mosquitos, they would attempt to reclaim them. He noted that the militias of the regions should be prepared to assist the runaway slaves because they have sought out the Catholic faith and want to become vassals of the Spanish King. Cabello also urged residents of the area that they should take up a collection in order to help pay for maintaining the refugees, since Vargas had made it clear that many of them were sick and exhausted from their trek and that there was not

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<sup>457</sup>Vargas described Garcia as a negro of about sixty years. Garcia described himself as a Christian.

enough food at his hacienda for all of them.<sup>458</sup>

Lawyers in charge of Corrin's estate, which had reverted to a five year old boy living on the Isle of Mann, rented out the property (including the wayward slaves) to an English settler along the Mosquito Coast, John McHarg. On 5 February 1776, McHarg set out to get the slaves back. McHarg sent two letters to Spanish authorities, one to Vargas and the other to a Juan Balanoe [Bolaños], asking for the return of the escaped property. Both letters accused Ulwa members belonging to Yarrince's tribe—which the English knew to be in the employ of the Spanish—of facilitating the slaves' escape.<sup>459</sup> McHarg also made explicit reference to the illegal trade that was carried on between the Spanish and the English settlers, by writing that if the slaves were returned then, "we might be able to carry on a trade which I do say would be of mutual advantage to both parties."<sup>460</sup> In the letter addressed to José Antonio Vargas, he also alluded that if the slaves were not returned, then the profitable history between Vargas and the British settlers at Bluefields would come to an end, stating, "From the good friendship that has so long subsided between you and this House, I hope now it's in your Power you will show your friendship is not at an end by your making these slaves be returned..."<sup>461</sup>

By insisting that they had come to Spanish-held territory seeking the Christian faith, the slaves and their families—either knowingly or unknowingly—created a significant legal obstacle should anyone try to get them to return to Bluefields. The

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<sup>458</sup>In the four months when the refugees were at Vargas' hacienda, he recorded that he spent 296 pesos and 6 reales in maintaining them. *Ibd.*, f. 65-67

<sup>459</sup>Jennifer Allan Goett states that McHarg also hired the Mosquito, General Tempest, to track down the escaped slaves. Jennifer Allan Goett, "Diasporic Identities, Autochthonous Rights: Race, Gender, and the Cultural Politics of Creole Land Rights in Nicaragua" (PhD Dissertation, Austin: University of Texas, 2006) p. 141. Goett, using Sorsby's earlier article, mistakenly places the slaves at Omoa. William Sorsby, "Spanish Colonization of the Mosquito Coast," *Revista de Historia de America* 73-73 (1972)

<sup>460</sup> f. 46-48

<sup>461</sup> f. 48-48v

Guatemalan fiscal argued that according to royal decrees from 19 December 1739 and 19 September 1774, Spanish authorities could not permit the return of the slaves nor any other persons, back to the custody of English settlers on the coast because they had come in search of Christianity. Moreover, the fiscal noted that all authorities along the frontier should, “treat the slaves and other people and admit them with the humanity which corresponds to giving all of them assistance and good treatment, so that other Caribes who make war on Spain know of the [good] treatment.”<sup>462</sup> In essence, Spanish authorities knew that the friendly treatment of the escaped slaves and refugees could foster other groups of marginalized peoples living in the Atlantic frontier to side with Spain over the British.

Instead of being settled along the frontier though, Governor Cabello ordered the group to be dispersed in the cities of western Nicaragua. Cabello justified this action by stating that the presence of the former British property would cause unnecessary tension along the frontier and could provide a pretext for attack. The long journey for the group took its toll. Many of those who arrived at Vargas’ hacienda were sick and remained so as they travelled to Granada and León. Several of the group, including some children, died along the way to Granada. By 15 June 1776, the twenty-nine who were the most sick were settled in Granada while the rest continued their journey to the provincial capital. Cabello reported that he had placed the refugees in convents and in the homes of people who were of ‘good standing and demeanor’ in the communities. For his role in the ordeal, Vargas received 296 pesos and six reales in repayment for his expenses and was also given custody by Cabello of “some of the negritos” in order to teach them the Catholic

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<sup>462</sup>Ibid., f. 58-59

faith and, presumably, to work on his estate.<sup>463</sup>

Spanish officials in Nicaragua did not always warmly welcome refugees nor did they always believe that their desires to become Christians were sincere. In 1774, for example, militia officials in Nueva Segovia asked for reinforcements because a number of Caribs had shown up at a mission that had just been attacked, asking to be let in. Governor Cabello responded to the request by warning the militia officers that Carib Indians had often come to missions and settlements asking for protection when they were attacked by others (presumably, Mosquito forces). When the threat to their immediate safety disappeared, Cabello argued that the Caribes usually return to their homes in the mountains. Cabello also specifically cast doubt on the intentions of the new arrivals in Nueva Segovia, warning that the Caribes could even be spies that were sent in “under the banner of hospitality and friendship” before an attack.<sup>464</sup>

In addition to settling refugees along the frontier, Vargas’ other official duties focused on protecting Spanish towns from further attacks and compiling useful information for his superiors about the frontier zone. For example, in the late 1770s Vargas sent to his superiors in León a number of reports on the current and historic movement of ‘enemies’ along the frontier. Using reports dating back to the 1740s, Vargas quoted one of his predecessors, Francisco Ortiz, by writing that the region was “in total peace and tranquility, free from invasions and the introduction of weapons, powder, and munitions” and remained that way until 1747. Ortiz, Vargas explained, had blamed the “distinct” rise in attacks on Spanish towns on the English, who had introduced “military

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<sup>463</sup>Ibd., f. 65-67. On 4 July 1776, Vargas informed authorities that one of the “negritos”, a boy of one year named Tobi, had died.

<sup>464</sup>Autos hechos en razon del informe que rindio el Teniente Lorenzo Vasquez, quien habia actuado en la reduccion de varios indios caribes (corre agregado el inform de Fr. Orozco, misionero que coopero en la reduccion.” *BAGG*, (Tomo 6, no. 1, Oct. 1940)

ordnance” including axes, machetes, lances, and arrows to Spain’s enemies.<sup>465</sup>

In addition to his reports, Governor Cabello ordered Vargas to make a map of the region and then survey the frontier for the possibility of constructing three lookouts, which could warn Spanish frontier communities of attacks. The map the Vargas produced (see Map 4.3) provides a wonderful opportunity to ‘see’ the frontier in one way that Spanish officials of the frontier understood the region. Despite its crude nature, Vargas’ map demonstrates a wealth of knowledge of the Atlantic frontier. The colorful map depicts parts of central and eastern Nicaragua (from northeast of Lake Nicaragua to the Atlantic Coast) and the lush conditions present in the Caribbean lowlands. The Mico River and its tributaries figure prominently in the map, highlighting the fact that rivers served as both the main mode of transportation as well as invasion routes. On the map, Vargas indicated from which passes and rivers enemy raiders had emerged from in order to attack Spanish towns in 1747, 1762, and 1776. Vargas also noted the location of the main Spanish settlements, some unnamed ones, and the pathways connecting the towns with each other and the rivers. Finally, Vargas plotted the three potential locations for watchtowers, placing two on hills near the town of Lobiguisca and one some twenty eight leagues to the south. The map and the reports Vargas sent in allowed officials in León to survey the frontier and helped persuade them to better staff the frontier militias. Vargas and other militia officers later reported that the lookouts worked a little too well, as they attracted the attention of Spain’s enemies and suffered countless attacks, eventually forcing Spanish authorities to withdraw from at least one of them because they were too

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<sup>465</sup>Interestingly, Ortiz also singled out that the British had also given salt to the unnamed enemies. Salt, as shown in dealings with Yarrince and others, had significant value among the peoples of the Atlantic frontier, and was often given by European powers as a way to curry favor since salt was both hard to come by and vital for survival in the hot and humid lowlands.

remote and too thinly manned.

Vargas was not the only Spanish authority in the region who had a working knowledge of the Atlantic frontier. One of his predecessors, Matias de Oropesa, compiled what he knew about the local geography, hydrology, languages, and history in a report submitted to authorities in 1757. For example, Oropesa knew that not far past the Spanish frontier, the Yasica river (a tributary of the Río Grande de Matagalpa) had a number of small villages along its banks inhabited by about 3,000 people. Oropesa reported that the inhabitants generally spoke ‘parrasta’, a few Mosquito groups also lived along the river, and that all of them disliked the Spanish. He also recorded the various names that each language group called each river. For example, he noted that the river the Spanish called the Metapa river was called Ostilladero by the English, the Mosquitos called it Aguatará, and the Caribes named it Quiguasa, which, he reported, meant “river of rocks” in their language. He also informed the president of the Audiencia that he knew where and in which directions the rivers of the Atlantic Frontier changed their courses; where the rapids were; and which tributaries and streams flowed into rivers and from which direction. He even noted the locations of where one could find plantains to eat that grew near the waterways.<sup>466</sup>

Other Spanish officials also actively sought a better understanding of the English and Mosquito settlements along the Atlantic coast. Frequently, they turned to recent arrivals to frontier towns for news and other information that could be useful. For

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<sup>466</sup> “Carta del Presidente de Guatemala, acompaña relacion del terreno que ocupan los ingleses, zambos, y mosquitos hecha por el corregidor de Sebaco y Chontales (Mathias de Oropesa)” in *Coleccion de Documentos Referentes a la historia colonial de Nicaragua*, pg. 186-188. Another one of his predecessors, Pedro Aleman, also had the title of captain of the conquest. See, “Titulo de Capitan de Conquista de la reduccion de yndios caribes e ynfielos que havitan en las montanas del partido de Sebaco y Chontales a Don Pedro Aleman” *BAGG*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (1940) pg. 308.

example, Governor Cabello ordered Vargas to question both sets of refugees about the size, location, and defensive measures in place in British settlements along the Mosquito Coast. Spies and informants supplied additional details about the military capabilities of the Mosquitos and British. The Spanish spy, José Esteban Sierra, not only reported on the illegal trade emanating out of the Black River settlements, he also commented on the British fortifications and number of armaments in the town.<sup>467</sup> Dismayed that the “entire [Atlantic] coastline...is seeded with the English and Indians partial to them,” the viceroy of Santa Fe dispatched a naval expedition from Cartagena, led by Juan Antonio Gastelu, to perform reconnaissance on the Central American coast. After capturing the British sloop *Morning Star*, Gastelu questioned the crew members regarding life on the Mosquito Coast and the British relationship with the Mosquitos. The captain also inquired about the types of weapons, tools, and other materials that the British traded with the Mosquito.<sup>468</sup> The details learned from informants, spies, and expeditions informed Spanish authorities in the New World and in Europe about the British military capabilities in the western Caribbean and would eventually help Galvez prepare his forces for his attack on British settlements during the wars of the American Revolution.

The considerable authority wielded by colonial officials in frontier settings also raised the possibility of corruption and abuse. Vargas himself attracted considerable suspicion from other members of the Spanish bureaucracy because of his close contact with non-tributary Indians and his ties to the British along the coast (see Chapter Two).

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<sup>467</sup> Floyd, *Anglo-Spanish Stuggle*.

<sup>468</sup> *Coleccion de documentos referentes a la historia colonial de Nicaragua. Recuerdo del centenario de la independencia nacional* (Managua, 1921), p. 194-205. The captain and owner of the *Morning Star* lodged official protests in the British Parliament, denouncing what they deemed as an illegal seizure of property, see, *The Parliamentary Register: Or, History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons*, Volume 6 (London, 1777), pp. 314-318.

Even more serious allegations came from Francisco Antonio de Urtecho, who in 1770 accused Vargas of killing one of the recent Carib arrivals. In addition to the murder, Urtecho also warned that Vargas was actively plotting to kill the others and had recently sold the entire town of Acoyapa for a “large ball of gold” to a Mosquito warlord.<sup>469</sup> Although the allegations against Vargas never amounted to any official punishment, the investigations proved damaging to Vargas’ reputation. Years later, the allegations of illegal activity and murder would be used as evidence against Yarrince, who had supposedly conspired with Vargas to kill the Caribs. It is clear, however, that Vargas enjoyed the benefits of his office. He had indigenous laborers work for him on his hacienda and used his authority to keep the children of others under his care in exchange for them working at his estate in domestic duties.

The activities of Gastelu, Oropesa, and Vargas offer a glimpse into how colonial officials conducted themselves both professionally and personally along the Atlantic frontier. It also demonstrates that local officials tried to turn their knowledge of the frontier into something more lucrative for themselves and their families. The relationships the Vargas cultivated between the Spanish Crown and peoples of the Atlantic frontier, his first-hand knowledge of the region, and his large network of contacts proved essential for Spain’s ability to retain control over any part of central Nicaragua and Honduras. Although Vargas’ request to become the sole Spaniard in charge of eastern Nicaragua was eventually denied, Spanish officials proposed two options as a reward for his valuable services. Guatemalan authorities proposed that he could either collect forty pesos each month (for the rest of his life) from the royal treasury

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<sup>469</sup>AGCA, A1 (5) Exp. 640 Leg. 78, “Testimonio del Ocurso hecho por parte del Cap. de Conquista Joseph Antonio de Bargas al Gov. y Com.te GERAL de la Provincia de Nicaragua y Proceido para la indagaicion de los puntos en esto citado ocruso se exponen” f. 57.

or he could become the corregidor of Sebaco and Matagalpa. The position of corregidor carried an annual salary of 250 pesos but had additional methods of producing more income for the Spanish official in charge of the area. The fiscal encouraged Vargas to take the corregidor position and noted that Vargas would be better suited than the current corregidor, Juan de la Rosa Caballo, who had been run out of the region because few of the communities could tolerate him and some had even rebelled against his authority. The fiscal also added that because it was known that the Indians of the province liked and respected him, “it would be a pleasure for them to have him as corregidor.”<sup>470</sup> Vargas would choose to be the corregidor. He also worked hard to ensure that his wealth and status did not end with him. He pressed Guatemalan authorities for, and later received, a commission for his son as tenente in the Compania de la Conquista of Juigalpa.

### *Yarrince*

Vargas’ most important role during his long career was to cultivate a relationship between Spanish officials and Yarrince and his tribe. Spain’s success in establishing a decade-long peace along the frontier came in large part because of Yarrince’s extensive knowledge of the Atlantic borderlands and the human resources he could marshal. Yarrince commanded a network of informants that supplied him with information on enemy movements; he knew the geography of the region; had experience trading with and living among Spain’s enemies; and had a significant number of armed followers that he could call upon. All of these qualities made him valuable to Spanish efforts to gain greater control of the region. Nonetheless, his opponents used his status as an indigenous leader, his past actions against Spanish towns along the Atlantic frontier, and the

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<sup>470</sup>AGI, Guatemala, 409 “Meritos de Don Joseph Antonio de Vargas en Nicaragua con los indios Zambos Mosquitos” 4 de Marzo 1776, f.4v-7.

considerable wealth that he extracted from local communities to sully his reputation and provoke Spanish authorities to eventually arrest him for treason.

Until the early 1760s, the tribe commanded by Yarrince numbered some three hundred people. They lived a semi-nomadic existence a few days travel from the Atlantic coast, moving along the many rivers of eastern Nicaragua. They occasionally participated in raids on Spanish communities and missions, such as when Yarrince's group attacked the mission at Guadalupe in 1762, some forty leagues east of Apompua.<sup>471</sup> They also traded with the British living along the Mosquito Shore. Indeed, members of Yarrince's tribe had come to British settlements so often they were known as the 'Garrison' tribe. Although they had developed a trading relationship with the British, that relationship did not help them avoid being targets of Mosquito slaving expeditions. For example, in 1762, Mosquito captains Tilas and Allen took thirty men up the Kringuas River to capture native slaves to sell to the British. The Mosquito group encountered fifty-three members of Yarrince's tribe that were travelling to Bluefields to trade. Instead, the slaving party captured them and brought them to Pearl Lagoon, where they sold them off.

The news of the most recent slave raid spurred Yarrince into action. After he communicated to the rest of his group to head further inland, away from the shore, Yarrince stuck out towards the coast. Yarrince travelled first to the British settlements along the coast to see the British Superintendent where he pleaded for the release of his people. The superintendent claimed he could do nothing for Yarrince, so he then travelled to Jamaica to speak with the governor. Romero Vargas reports that Vargas met with a man named Richard Jones, who offered to take Yarrince to see the Jamaican governor in Spanish Town, however, once they reached the governor's residence, he was unavailable.

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<sup>471</sup> Floyd, *Anglo-Spanish Struggle*, p. 115

With few other options left, Yarrince left Jamaica and returned to the Atlantic frontier.

In 1766, Yarrince made his first overtures to Spanish officials and residents of the frontier. In December, he called the residents of Apompuá to meet him at the base of a nearby mountain where he announced that he had defeated a group of Carib Indians at a site named Pantasma and asked the locals to be on the lookout for any survivors of the attack.<sup>472</sup> One of the locals, José Perez, was sent to Vargas' hacienda to inform him of the events and to relay a message from Yarrince. Perez told Vargas that Yarrince had offered to combat the "caribes" that attacked Spanish cattle ranches along the Atlantic frontier in exchange for some foodstuffs.<sup>473</sup> As a symbol of his goodwill, Yarrince sent along a linen handkerchief. Vargas responded by having one of his *criados*, Sebastian, return with Perez, carrying "some sweet things, meat, and other refreshments" to offer to Yarrince and his men.<sup>474</sup>

When Vargas informed his superiors of Yarrince's terms, they responded with cautious optimism. The Guatemalan fiscal noted that "it would be important to cultivate communication and friendship with this Carib, as much to put his forces to work against the Sambos, Mosquitos, and Caribs that insult our populations, [and] acquire news [of the frontier], as it is would be to bring them...to the faith and vassalage of His Majesty," though he also added that Vargas should not only be cautious with Yarrince, but also

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<sup>472</sup> There is some disagreement and confusion as to when Yarrince's group came to the Spanish. Romero Vargas identifies the forty-seven Caribes that came to Vargas' hacienda as Yarrince's people. Romero Vargas, *Las sociedades del Atlantico*, p. 324-330. However, in his initial letter detailing the arrival of the natives, Vargas makes clear that in addition to his interpreter Lopez, he also went to town (presumably Sebaco) where he found Yarrince and brought him to the hacienda to confirm what Lopez said about the motives of the natives and does not mention that Yarrince knew them. ACGA, A1. Exp. 4826 Leg. 119 "Sobre haber salido..."f. 11v-13.

<sup>473</sup> Vargas mentions giving some 'carne dulce', which may be some sort of meat empanada.

<sup>474</sup> ACGA, A1 (5) Exp. 2473 Leg. 117, "Sobre haber solicitado el Yndio Carive nombrado Capitan Yarrinsen situado en las immedaciones del Yngles Abrahan Yonocoston [Tonoston] la amistad de los espanoles y el amable Vasallaje de Nuestro Sobrano", f.1.

prudent.<sup>475</sup> On 11 January 1768, Vargas received word that he could grant Yarrince a provisional commission as captain as a way to symbolically cement and formalize the relationship between Yarrince and the Spanish government. In April of that year, Yarrince expressed his desire to formally meet with the Nicaraguan governor in order to relate to the information that he had on the English living along the coast. Fearing that Yarrince might still be a spy, Governor Cabello ordered that Vargas personally accompany him and the two interpreters from Camoapa all the way to the provincial capital in León. As added security, Cabello instructed that they were not to talk to anyone, give out their names, nor tell anyone where came from. Moreover, he told them to send word when they were within a league or two from León, so they could enter the city in his carriage.

Yarrince, Vargas, and the two interpreters arrived in León on 3 September. On 9 September, Cabello finally met with the Captain of the Caribes. In their meeting, Cabello had Yarrince answer a number of questions regarding life along the coast and in the lowlands that separated the coast from the Spanish settlements in Central Nicaragua. Yarrince's testimony reveals that he not only understood the stakes of the meeting but that he also knew how to best position himself (and to a lesser extent his people) in taking advantage Spain's weakness along the Atlantic frontier. Indeed, Yarrince was not afraid to emphasize that the people who he claimed as his fellow tribesmen were his alone and that his help could greatly increase Spanish power in the region. The governor and Yarrince went over the location of the Mosquito groups along the coasts, the numbers of armed men that the various groups of the Atlantic frontier could muster, how the Mosquito organized themselves, and what they traded with the English. Yarrince

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<sup>475</sup> f. 3v-4.

explained that the English traded their manufactures and alcohol for wood, deer hides, and enslaved Indians that came from the interior of the province. Governor Cabello expressed interest in knowing the names and location of all the English settlers that lived (and were thought to have ruled) the Mosquitos, such as the settlement at Punta Gorda on the San Juan River, commanded by an Englishman named Jack, and populated with a number of “English, blacks, Zambos, and Mosquitos”. Yarrince also explained to the governor that there were two types of Caribs: the civilized ones, which he commanded, and the *caribes sumos*, which had allied themselves with the Mosquitos.<sup>476</sup> He added that the number of men that the sumos could field was about a hundred, which, Yarrince made clear, had been reduced from a much higher number because he had killed many of them. He also stated that he led a group of people which could have five hundred armed men ready for war. Finally, Yarrince told Cabello that he wanted to continue to impede Mosquito invasions of Spanish territory and asked to be made a captain permanently. The Spanish would formalize his request on 7 December, 1768 and granted permission for Yarrince’s group to remain in Spanish territory.<sup>477</sup>

It did not take long for Yarrince to prove his worth. In November of 1769, Yarrince and his men tracked down and captured the architect of an attack on the town of Camoapa some two years earlier. Yarrince and his men brought the Mosquito leader, known as Pabón (or sometimes Paugil), back to Camoapa. While there, some of the inhabitants tried to kill the Carib leader, however before that could happen Captain Vargas and his company of troops arrived and decided that Pabón would be given over to

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<sup>476</sup> The scribe uses the term “caribes mansos”, which is usually translated as tamed or gentle, but in the context, it seems appropriate use the term civilized.

<sup>477</sup> AGCA, A1 (5) Exp. 4832 Leg. 119 “Titulos y Fee de Bautismo del Indio Caribe Capitan Carlos Matias Ignacio José Antonio Yarrince

Spanish authorities in León, where they could interrogate him. When Pabón arrived in León on 16 November 1769, the governor, seeing that he was a “horrible man of gigantic proportions” had Pabón placed in chains and put in jail. It is not known what, if any, information the Spanish were able to extract from Pabón, as he died while in prison and no other records of his captivity have been located. Nevertheless, Pabón’s capture helped Yarrince achieve a level of notoriety and trust from the Spanish officials. Years later, as officials assessed Yarrince’s contribution to subduing the frontier in preparation for renewing his commission, the capture of Pabón figured prominently in their recommendation that he receive another *patente*.

Yarrince also established an active intelligence network by placing several trusted subordinates along the Río Grande de Matagalpa to report the movements of Mosquito raiding parties and the location of their settlements. At least one of those subordinates secured a commission from the Spanish government. A Carib that went by the name Will (sometimes spelled Huil by the Spanish) received official recognition and drew pay from the Spanish. Placed in charge of the area around the landing at Carca by Yarrince, Will helped to put down a small rebellion. For his role in subduing rebellious Indians, Captain General Pedro de Salazar granted him the title of Lieutenant of the Caribes, with the added responsibility to “harass the enemies from the Sambo, Mosquito, and Sumu Carib nations by every means possible.”<sup>478</sup>

The authority that Yarrince developed in frontier towns helped him amass wealth and prestige. From their settlement at Olama Real, located south-east of Muy Muy along the road to Boaco, Yarrince and his men patrolled the frontier regions of Nueva Segovia,

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<sup>478</sup>Quoted from Tompson “Diss” p. 70. See also AGCA, A1 (5) Exp. 4832 Leg. 119 “Titulos y Fee de Bautismo del Indio Caribe Capitan Carlos Matias Ignacio José Antonio Yarrince.”

Matagalpa, and Chontales. In the process of doing so, they established and maintained close contact with the communities in the area. Reports from residents of Boaco indicated that they gave Yarrince permission to establish his main camp at Olama Real and that at its height, the camp had some three hundred residents. Yarrince also worked out a deal with locals to have them provide food and supplies to Yarrince's group in exchange for protecting them from invasions. Cofradias in the towns of Boaco, Camoapa, and Muy Muy paid tribute annually to Yarrince himself by giving him money and cattle. The town of Boaco also built Yarrince a *rancho* in the town so that Yarrince and his family could stay during Holy Week and Holy Days. They provided them with three additional cows to slaughter during the festivities. Other towns also gave Yarrince food when he stayed in the communities. An inventory of Yarrince's possessions in 1780 revealed that through these arrangement he had amassed considerable wealth, mostly in the form of livestock.<sup>479</sup>

Yarrince took other public steps to legitimate his status and authority for himself and family. In addition to his baptism in Granada in 1779, Yarrince was legally married to his longtime partner, María de la Rosa, with whom he had seven children, in a ceremony in Boaco. During the wedding the priest, Manuel Perez, also legitimated the status of the children. Now that his children were his legal heirs, they would receive certain legal protections including the ability to claim their father's property in case of his

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<sup>479</sup>In addition to a "mountain of corn", a house that measured twelve by eight varas long, some furniture, Yarrince had one hundred and twenty-eight cattle of all types, twenty-seven horses (with six breeding pairs), and a mule. Montiel Arguello cites an inventory of done in 1778 that shows that the cofradias in the area had most of their holdings in cattle. He records that the two cofriadias in Camoapa had a total of 387 cattle, the six cofradias in Boaco had 940, and the four in Muy Muy had a total of 1,777 cattle. Interestingly, the inventory did not mention any of the elaborate gifts that the Bishop of Nicaragua had sent to Yarrince, which included an elaborately adorned staff, two swords, fine threads and shirts, ornate epaulettes, and other items of clothing. See Guerrero and Soriano, *Cacique Yarrince*, pg. 68-69

death. Yarrince also arranged to have one of his daughters marry one of his trusted indigenous officers, a man named Yampo.

Some officials doubted the sincerity of Yarrince's transformation from the Caribe raider who terrorized Spanish towns to one of the main men in charge of safeguarding the Spanish frontier. José Ramero, the Padre Guardian that had dismissed the possibility of sending missionaries to Vargas' hacienda, told Guatemalan officials that he did not trust Yarrince. The Padre Guardian accused Yarrince of guiding the four Englishmen and one hundred Mosquito warriors that attacked the Guadalupe mission. Although Ramero admitted that Yarrince's authority among the "infidels" could help efforts to covert the natives, he "cannot be counted on." Moreover, he denounced Captain Vargas for colluding with Yarrince to carry on illegal trade with the English even though Vargas knew that Yarrince was "one of the principle chiefs for the enemy" and spied on Spanish settlements for the English. As his last piece of evidence, Ramero added that Yarrince had placed his mother, sister, and nephew in the care of a Spanish missionary for several months while he did business with the English, only to take them away from the mission. A few months later, the mission was attacked and destroyed by Mosquito raiders.<sup>480</sup> For Ramero, at least, it was proof that Yarrince still collaborated with the English and his presence along the frontier was a threat to Spain's authority.

Other authorities also found some of Yarrince's activities a cause for concern. The suspicious deaths of an Englishman and a Mosquito in Teustepe in 1778 brought increased attention to some of Yarrince's unsanctioned activities along the frontier and

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<sup>480</sup> A1. Exp. 4826 Leg. 119 "Sobre haber salido voluntariamente..." f. 29-31. The Padre Guardian indicated that it was the Mision de Aguasca where Yarrince deposited his mother and relatives, but I have been unable to find more information about the location of the mission.

signaled the beginning of the end of his relationship with Spanish authorities. Through witness testimony and evidence found at the scene, José Longinos de Castro, a militia captain and lead investigator of the deaths, alleged that three mulatto libres from Teustepe, Yarrince, and Lieutenant Will had killed the Englishman, named Captain Chambers, and the Mosquito in a contraband deal gone wrong. Castro reported that he had found axes, machetes, and a trunk of clothing that Yarrince and the others had stolen off the dead Englishman on Huil's ranch. Bernardino Munoz (the main witness) said that after some drinking, Chambers, who reportedly had with him 3,000 pesos, was hit in the head after some insults were exchanged. Munoz then claimed that Will then decided to kill Chambers, and did so with a lance. After killing the Mosquito, Yarrince and Will took the majority of the goods for themselves and left the three pardos with some cloth, twenty pesos and a shotgun. Castro sent the testimonies he collected to Joaquin Folch de Cardona, Corregidor of Matagalpa. In Matagalpa, Folch questioned Joaquin Bravo, who told him that a year earlier Yarrince had offered to sell illegal clothing and told him to ask around to find others that wanted some. As Folch prepared to expand the scope of the investigations into Yarrince's crimes, progress on it stopped. Governor Quiroga told Folch that as Corregidor of Matagalpa, he lacked the authority to investigate Yarrince.

The investigation resumed when news of the murder spread to other Spanish and British authorities in Central America. Also spurring the investigation was the desperate need for reliable news about the Atlantic frontier. In April of 1779, war broke out between Spain and Britain when Spain sided with the North American rebels. In November of 1779, a company of militia troops entered Boaco to check on the status of the still vulnerable frontier. In a letter, Yarrince threatened the commander of the

company by communicating that he “did not consent” to any of the troops moving beyond their current position. On 8 April 1780, Ingacio Maestre wrote to Matias Galvez (who as Captain General of the Audiencia had come to Granada in order to direct the Spanish effort of repelling a potential British attack up the San Juan River) and reported that he had investigated the town of Boaco and that the residents told him that Yarrince had retreated with his people into the mountains. Maestre also reported that Yarrince’s ability to command a large following was not as fearsome as it had once been.

Conflicting reports from Boaco residents mentioned that he he had lost many followers. Some said that he had only twenty-six left out of three hundred men. Others, such as José María Alexandre, believed that only Yarrince, his wife, one of their children, and a relative remained living in the mountains. Despite the accusations of criminal behavior, his retreat into the mountains, and the fact that locals paid tribute to him, a Spanish official reported that when residents of Boaco spoke about Yarrince, they still did so in a reverential manner.

Later reports caused further alarm. Testimonies from residents of the Atlantic frontier indicated that Yarrince maintained contact with the British and some reported that he had promised his allegiance to a British captain. The Captain General sent oidor Joaquin de Plaza to the area, where in addition to following up on the investigation of Castro and others, also accused Yarrince of providing weapons to Spain’s enemies, and found records dating back to 1769 that catalogued Yarrince’s attempts to openly sell contraband textiles and clothing. A few month later, Galvez received word from the commander of the Spanish garrison at Matina. He described a rumor that Yarrince had aligned himself with the English and the Mosquitos during a meeting in Bluefields. He

further told Galvez that Yarrince was keeping the British informed of Spanish movements along the frontier. Galvez, in a letter to Spanish authorities in September of 1780, threatened to pull all his troops out of Granada and send them into the mountains to capture Yarrince so Galvez could publicly hang him. However, by that date, word had reached the Captain General that British troops had launched their attack on the San Juan River, making the threat moot.

Eventually (sources are unclear and contradictory), Spanish officials in Boaco managed to arrest Yarrince without incident.<sup>481</sup> The captors brought Yarrince first to Granada. Of the various charges that Yarrince found himself accused of, the most serious charges were that he offered his services to a British officer, a captain Blair, and that he failed to inform Spanish officials that the British were going to attack the fortress on the San Juan River. Yarrince denied these charges, testifying that when Blair asked for his support Yarrince told him no because he already allied himself with the King of Spain. Yarrince further recorded that he wrote several people, including Ignacio de Maestre, Joaquin Folch de Cardona, and other high-ranking people in Granada about the attack, but nobody believed him. In response to the allegations that he had extorted the towns, Yarrince told his captors that he received a few cows from various *cofradías* along the frontier each year because they were grateful for his work in protecting the frontier. Yarrince's captors and other Spanish officials in the area also reported rumors circulating in the countryside that Yampo, Yarrince's son-in-law, was gathering troops to break Yarrince out of jail and that he was somehow still communicating with the British.

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<sup>481</sup> Guerro and Soriano write that Captains Morales and Toledo arrested Yarrince, but do not give the date. *Cacique Yarrince*, p. 77. Arguello cites a document from 6 April 1780 that puts Manuel José Bermudez as the one who placed Yarrince in jail. *Nicaragua colonial*, p. 332.

Later, one of the guards accused Yarrince of trying to bribe his way out of prison.<sup>482</sup> In July of 1780, Galvez ordered that authorities transport Yarrince to Guatemala so he could be interrogated. After several inconclusive interrogation sessions, Yarrince, who had been sick for some time, confessed his sins to Father Miguel Medina, on 25 September 1780 and died the next day from a fever.

After he died, three petitions arrived in Guatemala to clear Yarrince's name.<sup>483</sup> One petition came from his wife, with the remaining two penned by residents of the towns of Muy Muy and Boaco. Yarrince's wife, María de la Rosa, gave testimony about the character of her husband. She related the story about how Yarrince bravely led the successful counter-assault when enemies attacked Camoapa. She also told authorities that he never profited from his position and that the corregidor (unnamed, but most likely either Folch or Vargas) took away all the cattle. The two towns reported similar things, that he was a good, honest man. After several years it was decided on Nov. 22, 1788 that Yarrince's heirs deserved to get their goods back. Authorities divided nearly four hundred livestock between the surviving children.

Yarrince's absence was almost immediately felt along the frontier. In 1782, Mosquito bands marched into Chontales, burning and looting towns along their way. They also captured twenty-one people, including a ten-year-old girl named María Manuela Rodríguez, who would later become an influential figure herself (see below).<sup>484</sup> As the memory of the alleged wrongdoings of Yarrince faded and violence returned to the frontier, locals and even some high-ranking officials questioned the wisdom of

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<sup>482</sup> Romero Vargas, *La sociedades del Atlantico...* p. 241

<sup>483</sup> It is highly likely that these petitions arrived after Yarrince's death.

<sup>484</sup> Olien, "General, Governor, and Admiral" p. 300

arresting one of Spain's most effective allies in a tenuous border region. As he made his way on the inspection tour of his diocese in 1788, the new Bishop of Nicaragua and Costa Rica, Juan Felix de Villegas, wrote the following about the arrest of Yarrince:

I suppose it would be fair, and perhaps necessary, for the peace and security of those towns [along the frontier] of Yarrince's arrest, but the consequences have been regrettable. The Indians of those towns spoke of him [Yarrince] as a restorer, or as the author of the peace and tranquility in which they lived, without being insulted by the Caribs, who live on robbing and causing whatever destruction they can in these frontiers...

Yarrince's removal from the border region not only endangered the safety of Spanish towns and missions along the frontier, it also removed the main motivation for indigenous groups to choose to be settled in Spanish territory: safety. Villegas reported that Yarrince's capture endangered much of the progress that had been made in the last two decades. Spanish missionaries reported difficulties in keeping converts in the missions and saw increased attacks on Spanish officials and towns. Furthermore, rumors stated that some of Yarrince's followers and relatives conspired to attack Spanish towns. Villegas wrote that he had come across an Indian from Muy Muy who had learned to read and write from the Mercedian Friar Faustino Robleto some years earlier but was now wary of working with authorities. The Indian told him that after Yarrince was captured and taken prisoner, many of the recently reduced Indians fled into the mountains because they feared for their safety.<sup>485</sup> Despite offering assurances that the natives would not be

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<sup>485</sup> In many ways, this act of fleeing into the woods is similar to the experience of other natives in the Americas in their experiences with European colonial powers. As Ken Lightfoot has shown, European presence in the Americas not only affected indigenous peoples directly, but also shifted the ways in which indigenous groups acted towards one another. Moreover, he found that for indigenous peoples of California, the act of running away from missions was a complex manifestation of indigenous agency. See Ken Lightfoot, *Indians, Missionaries, and Merchants: The Legacy of Colonial encounters on the California Frontiers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

harmed or imprisoned, the bishop informed Guatemalan authorities that he could not find any local Indians to assist him in his attempts to attract the local Indians back into the missions.

Ultimately, Villegas' actions and advice to the Guatemalan authorities helped to momentarily avert further outbreaks of violence along the Atlantic frontier. His recommendations to restore Yarrince's goods to his relatives, offering a general pardon to Caribs that participated in recent violence, and renewing missionary activity in the region helped to quiet some of the fears of local officials and towns and offered a way for indigenous groups to return to Spanish towns without the fear of reprisal. He also dealt directly with Yarrince's family. Members of Yarrince's immediate family did not know if he had died or if he was still in prison. Baltasar Montoya, Yarrince's son-in-law, asked the Bishop of Nicaragua in 1788 if Yarrince was alive or dead, some seven years after he had been captured and died in the hands of Spanish authorities. In an attempt to most likely avoid an outbreak of violence on the frontier, Bishop Villegas lied to Yarrince's brother-in-law and told him that Yarrince had gone to New Spain with Galvez when he was named as viceroy. Yarrince's family, with most of their wealth restored, seemed to either believe and accept the bishop's claim. While these measures may have addressed some of the immediate concerns over the Atlantic frontier, the larger question of securing the region from attacks from Mosquito forces remained.

### **Spanish Overtures to the Mosquito and the use of Non-Spanish Intermediaries**

Yarrince was not the only indigenous leader that the Spanish tried to cultivate a relationship with. At several points during the eighteenth century, Spanish authorities actively sought out leaders of Mosquito bands in an attempt to turn their long-time

enemies into useful allies. Moreover, it is clear that Spanish authorities were not the only ones who entertained ideas about reconfiguring the political and economic landscape of the Atlantic frontier. Mosquitos in leadership positions often took the lead in initiating contact with Spanish officials as regional and global events shifted local realities and priorities. The interaction between Spanish officials and their Mosquito counterparts over the course of the late eighteenth century not only reveal Spain's intense desire to eliminate British power and influence over the coast but also demonstrates the complexity of inter-Mosquito political dynamics, as some leaders sought to ally themselves with the Spanish while others remained steadfast allies of the British. Just as the Spanish hoped to exploit the rivalries and differences between the Zambos and the Indian Mosquitos, Mosquito groups also proved skilled at manipulating European powers. Third-parties, usually European residents of the Mosquito Coast, also played a part in shaping how Spain interacted with and administered the region once Spain gained control of the coastal areas after the departure of the British in 1787. Just like their Spanish counterparts, non-Spanish intermediaries, often put their own priorities ahead of assisting the Spanish Crown's efforts to colonize the area and could contribute to the already strained Spanish-Mosquito relationship. Ultimately, the Mosquitos largely succeeded in maintaining their independent status for the rest of the colonial period despite the economic, religious, cultural, and political institutions that Spain hastily tried to construct in the wake of the American Revolutionary War.

In July of 1769, the Spanish governor of Costa Rica, José de Nava, enthusiastically wrote to his superiors about a potential breakthrough in Spanish relations

with the indigenous groups living along the Atlantic coast of Central America. It was this desire to remove the British from their settlements that de Nava wrote to Nicaraguan governor Domingo Cabello. He informed Cabello that three emissaries of an influential Mosquito leader, Admiral Dilson, had recently approached the commander of the Spanish fort in the Matina valley with a proposal and requested to speak with the Costa Rican governor.<sup>486</sup>

De Nava had the three, who he called Yasparal, Yani, and Bersa, escorted to the Costa Rican city of Cartago, where he entertained them for several weeks.<sup>487</sup> Although little is known about the original proposal that the emissaries arrived with, de Nava reported to his superiors that he tried to convince the three of how the English had taken advantage of the Mosquito. He argued that the English made the Mosquito work all year for just a little aguardiente and some “rags”. The governor also raised the point that the English fostered hate between the Spanish and Mosquitos, which lead to the impoverishment of both. De Nava told them that if they accepted Spain’s protection they would prosper in trade and gifts. Additionally, de Nava suggested that a fort with a Spanish garrison could be built in their territory, which would help protect them if the

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<sup>486</sup>De Nava hints in his letter to Cabello that it was his actions that led to the diplomatic coup, as he left standing orders with his lieutenant at Matina to work at improving relations between the Mosquito and the Spanish by giving them gifts, calling on them, and to “treat them as Christians”. AGCA, A1.12 (5) Leg. 117, Exp. 2475. Some of the documentation surrounding this event was published in the *Boletín del Archivo General del Gobierno* [hereafter *BAGG*] “Autos de la consulta que elevo el Capitan Gobernador de la Provincia de Costa Rica acerca de que varios indios Moscos al mando de Yasparal, Yani y Versa, intentan su reduccion” Año 5, no. 4 (1940), pg. 336.

<sup>487</sup> Yasparal’s name was actually Jasper Hall. He was named after a Jamaican slave trader of the same name who, coincidentally, sold the Spanish commander at Omoa several shipments of slaves during the 1750s to the 1770s. See “Slavery and Social Differentiation: Slave Wages in Omoa” in *Blacks and Blackness in Central America* According to Floyd, de Nava’s home in Cartago was elegantly decorated with fine items, including many manufactured in England. Floyd suggests that this display of material goods and de Nava’s reported affable nature may have helped sway the Mosquito representatives. Floyd, *Anglo-Spanish Struggle*, pg. 124.

English ever attempted an invasion from Jamaica. The Mosquito representatives, de Nava wrote, seemed amenable to the idea of helping the Spanish, but needed several guarantees put in place. These included provisions for: letting Admiral Dilson maintain his title and to ensure he received the same official courtesies; land in the Matina Valley to grow their own cacao; the continued ability to hunt turtles and to go on slaving expeditions targeting ‘caribe’ Indians; sell their goods to whomever they wanted to; and to be allowed to travel up the San Juan River unmolested by the Spanish.<sup>488</sup>

At the request of the president of the Audiencia, Spanish authorities in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Honduras weighed in on the proposal from the Mosquito leaders in Costa Rica. Some, such as the fiscal of the Audiencia, seemed optimistic. He argued that as long as the proposed relationship with the Mosquito did not burden the royal treasury, then it should proceed. The fiscal also hoped that by gratifying the requests of the Mosquito leaders, they could become capable allies in the same way as indigenous groups did in Florida.<sup>489</sup> Several veteran officials, especially ones with experience in dealing with Mosquito proposals of peace, warned that the proposals—like the Mosquito themselves—were not to be trusted and doubted the ability of Admiral Dilson to sway other Mosquito leaders into signing a lasting peace. Alonso Fernández de Heredia, former governor of Honduras and Nicaragua, argued that the Mosquito were too fickle to treat with and had grown too accustomed to living freely under British rule. He recalled that when he offered “even more generous” peace terms to Mosquito leaders in 1745, it failed. He explained that the situation they presently faced would be even more difficult because

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<sup>488</sup> They also demanded that Admiral Dilson be gifted a ceremonial cane with a silver head and that the sons of certain families be allowed to come to Cartago, learn Spanish, as well as to read and write, and to be baptized.

<sup>489</sup> “Autos de la consulta”, *BAGG*, no. 4 (1940), 341-342.

the British had over two decades to solidify their positions along the coast. Fernández also warned about the dangers of giving the Mosquito peoples too much alcohol, writing that “the aguardiente will only serve to get them drunk and make them commit a thousand blunders, setting a bad example to the vassals of the King”.

More damning testimony came from the Royal Engineer Diez Navarro, who, as the main architect of Spanish fortifications in Central America, had years of experience interacting with Mosquito representatives and delegations. Navarro wrote that he agreed with Fernández’s concerns, especially about the inability to control the Mosquitos when they had access to alcohol, but added one important caveat to the discussion. Navarro noted that all of the proposals had failed to mention the existence of the Zambo peoples also living along the coast. The Zambos, Navarro argued, were distinct from the Mosquitos and had their own relationship with the British. This omission troubled Navarro for a number of reasons, including the fact that the Zambos fielded more than three times the number of armed men the Mosquitos could.<sup>490</sup>

The doubts of Navarro and Fernández caused some pause among Guatemalan authorities. Audiencia president Melchor Vidal de Lorca y villanueva suggested that Spanish negotiators take the words of caution from the experienced officials to heart when dealing with Mosquito groups. The president also insisted on further study of the how Spain would govern the Atlantic coast if it ever succeeded in driving the British from their positions and questioned how effective the proposal from Admiral Dilson was. The agreement, however, failed to materialize when Spanish authorities received news that Dilson had been killed in March of 1770. Offen suggests that British authorities had

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<sup>490</sup> Claudia Garcia, “Interaccion etnica y diplomatica de fronteras en el reino miskitu a fines de siglo XVIII” *Anuario de estudios Americanos* 56 (1999): 103-105.

Dilson assassinated because they feared that Dilson's efforts would upset the political and ethnic boundaries that the British had carefully crafted on the Atlantic shore, potentially jeopardizing their settlements and trade in the region. Offen also theorizes that in the aftermath of Dilson's death, the Zambo Mosquitos tried to assert their authority over their more indigenous counterparts by helping British settlers move into the southern portions of the Mosquito Coast.<sup>491</sup>

Despite the setback with Dilson's apparent murder, Spanish efforts to win support from the Mosquito continued in the 1770s and for the remainder of the colonial period. However, instead of directly contacting Mosquito leaders or relying on them to approach Spanish authorities, royal officials often turned to "Indian agents" to establish relations with Mosquito groups. Royal officials believed that these middlemen, who already had past dealings with Mosquito leaders and settlements, could facilitate an agreement between the Spanish and Mosquito groups that could lead to peace and an alliance against the British. The men that sold their services to Spain all had experience on the Atlantic coast, usually as traders or as British officials. The main ones employed by Spain in the eighteenth century included an Irishman, a North American colonist originally from Virginia, and a former British official. Spain would come to rely almost exclusively on these go-betweens to act on the behalf of the Spanish government, especially after Great Britain formally agreed to withdraw from the Atlantic coast. The ability of these third parties to conduct the affairs of Spain, however, was not without its problems and often complicated Spanish efforts to establish effective policies in territories it claimed to oversee.

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<sup>491</sup> Offen, "The Sambo and Tawira Miskitu", pp. 350-351

In 1778, Spanish officials in London were approached by Jeremiah Terry, who offered his services to the Spanish Crown. Terry, who originally hailed from Virginia, was a long-time resident of the Mosquito Coast and promised the Spanish minister in London, the Marquis de Almodovar del Rio, that he could arrange a peace between the Mosquito and Spain. Official in Spain believed—or perhaps hoped—that Terry could deliver on his promises. Indeed, as the possibility of Spain actively participating in the North American revolution grew, it seems likely that Spanish officials would make plans to help secure areas from British influence. In Bilbao, Spain outfitted Terry with a ship, the *Atlantico*, a crew, and a number of gifts meant to entice the Mosquito leaders to join Spain. Once the ship reached Central America's Atlantic coast in August of 1778, Terry arranged for a meeting to be held at the mouth of the San Juan River. Reports are mixed as to what happened next. Floyd argues that the four main Mosquito authorities (the King, Admiral, Governor, and General) plus the King's brother signed an agreement when they came aboard the ship on 15 August. After the treaty was signed, Spanish sailors, along with Terry, came ashore and constructed a trading post and some temporary shelters. At some point, Floyd reports that Mosquito warriors attacked the encampment and slaughtered everyone save two sailors.<sup>492</sup> Romero Vargas, however, reports that Terry's primary mission, with Spain's blessing, was to establish a timber-cutting and fishing operation along the Atlantic coast and to export the products directly to Spain. He notes that Terry brought with him a considerable number of iron working tools and other implements to start the enterprise, but lacked the workers to do so. The signed agreement between Terry and the Mosquito leadership on 15 August gave him permission to stay

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<sup>492</sup> Floyd, *Anglo-Spanish*, pp. 126-127.

and to contract work from locals for a “customary price of labor”.<sup>493</sup> Terry’s efforts however created conflict with other English settlers and the main British official on the coast. They used their influence among the Mosquito leadership to have them capture Terry and take him to Jamaica where he was accused of being a Spanish spy.<sup>494</sup> Regardless whether Terry was murdered or simply captured, Spain’s use of him to establish an agreement with Mosquito leaders signaled the increasing use of foreign intermediaries in Spain’s dealings on Central America’s Atlantic coast.

Spain’s entry into the American Revolution in 1779 precipitated a number of changes that altered the political landscape of the Atlantic frontier. The war and its aftermath placed Spain in a new position of authority on the coast as the British withdrew, yet it also forced them to rely upon of Indian agents to supervise the Atlantic Coast due to a lack of experienced personnel in the region. From 1782 to 1790, Spain’s main agent on the southern Mosquito Coast (roughly south of Gracias a dios to Costa Rica) was British man named Robert Hodgson (sometimes called Robert Hodgson Jr. or the Younger to distinguish him from his father, who also had the same name).<sup>495</sup> Hodgson’s extensive experience and personal connections to indigenous leaders offered Spain its best hope for successfully incorporating the region into the Spanish empire and

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<sup>493</sup>Romero Vargas, *Las sociedades del Atlántico*, p. 29; 184-185.

<sup>494</sup>Weber also agrees that Terry probably was taken to Jamaica. Weber, *Bárbaros*, p. 164 with further explanation in n. 171, pp. 330-331.

<sup>495</sup>There are some secondary and printed primary sources for Hodgson. See, Sánchez Pedrote, “El coronel Hodgson”; José Torre Revello, “Escritos hallados en poder del espía inglés Roberto Hodgson (1783)” *Boletín del Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas*, V, 1926, p. 76-100; Additionally, most of the primary documents located in Spain written by or about Hodgson, have been digitized and are readily available online. See, for example, “Expediente sobre el coronel Robert Hodgson”, Archivo General de Simancas, Guerra, 6945. In the AGCA, there are several expedientes about Hodgson, most of which deal with his estate after his death. The main one for present purposes is a copy of reports made in Nueva Granada. See, A1.12.7 Exp. 53.642, Leg. 6056, “Informe, fechado en Santa Fe, del Nuevo Reino de Granada, sobre los servicios prestados en la reduccion de los Indios Moscos, por el coronel Robert Hodgson.”

pacifying the independent indigenous groups that had successfully withstood Spanish domination for over a century. Nevertheless, Hodgson's conduct while he represented Spanish interests, along with Spain's inability to colonize the area with Spanish colonists and inability of fulfill economic promises to indigenous leaders, had the combined effect of alienating important allies and angering the indigenous leaders that Spain needed in order to succeed.

The younger Hodgson arrived on the Mosquito Coast in 1749. He had just finished attending a British military academy where he learned the engineering and map-making skills that he would use for the rest of his life. Hodgson travelled to the coast in order to join his father who, in 1740, had been appointed as the first British Superintendent of the Mosquito Shore. The younger Hodgson would go on to establish his home in Bluefields and managed to marry into the wealthiest family on the Mosquito Coast, by wedding the daughter of William Pitt. An astute observer of regional conditions and a tireless self-promoter, Hodgson engaged himself in a number of business enterprises.<sup>496</sup> For example, he sought to establish indigo and sugar plantations on Corn Island and also busied himself in organizing a number of colonization schemes for the region. However, these plans either failed to generate enough interest or were not followed through. He garnered more success as a merchant, selling goods through commercial agents to British settlements, Spanish contrabandistas, and natives. In addition to reinvesting much of the profits back into his trading activities, Hodgson also

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<sup>496</sup> These observations can be seen in a number of published and unpublished documents and maps that Hodgson created as either business plans, reports for the British and later the Spanish authorities, and in his defense of himself against accusations made in the 1770s. See, for example, *The Defense of Robert Hodgson, Esq., Late Superintendent, Agent, and Commander-in-Cheif of the Mosquito Shore. Humbly Addressed to the Right Honourable The Lords of Trade and Plantations in Answer to the Complaints Against Him from Sundry Inhabitants of the British Settlement There*. London, 1779.

used the wealth to acquire land and slaves.<sup>497</sup> Between 1768 and 1776, Hodgson, no doubt helped by his training, wealth, and social position, followed in his father's footsteps to become the fourth British Superintendent on the coast. As superintendent, Hodgson travelled extensively in the region, including making the voyage to Jamaica to meet with British officials there at least fourteen times.

Despite his wealth and political connections, Hodgson frequently found himself at odds with British settlers on the coast as well as the Governor of Jamaica, Sir Edward Trelawny. The settlers and governor claimed that Hodgson had abused his position and overstepped his authority. For example, Hodgson took it upon himself to oversee all disputes between settlers on the Mosquito shore, even though the Jamaican governor claimed that right. The British settlers also reported that Hodgson's poor administration of the coast had driven the mosquito leader Admiral Dilson (see above) into the arms of the Spanish, which threatened to upset balance of power in the region. The settlers worried that if the Spanish could win over Mosquito leaders then it would only be a matter of time before the Spanish (aided by their new allies) would drive out the British from their positions on the Central American coast.<sup>498</sup> Karl Offen argues that it was Hodgson's insistence to regulate and review all the land grants that settlers had previously received from Mosquito leaders that angered residents the most. Offen suggests that this new power allowed Hodgson to effectively usurp other land claims around Bluefields, especially the estate of Henry Corrin, thus placing him as the sole

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<sup>497</sup> It was said by 1786 Hodgson had ninety slaves, twenty head of cattle, and five boats at his estate in Bluefields. By 1791, Hodgson claimed to have 160,000 acres in and around Bluefields, with more land in other parts of the region. Romero Vargas, *Las sociedades*, p. 117 and p. 114 respectively.

<sup>498</sup> Naylor, *Penny Ante Imperialism*, p. 57-58 and Romero Vargas, *Las Sociedades del Atlantico*, pp. 104-111.

British land owner for most of the southern coast.<sup>499</sup> Robert Naylor, on the other hand, suggests that Hodgson's move to review all land grants had the ultimate aim of protecting the Anglo-Mosquito alliance. Hodgson, Naylor argues, acted as if he believed that British settlers were taking advantage of the indigenous populations in an effort to seize all the available land before the British formally colonized the region.<sup>500</sup>

Whatever Hodgson's motivations, his decision to review land transfers and titles upset powerful interests. Pressure from disgruntled British settlers and complaints from the Jamaican governor eventually forced the British to recall Hodgson to London and appoint a new superintendent, James Lawrie, in 1776. When in London, Hodgson mounted a spirited and public defense of his policies. While he made his case to be reinstated as superintendent, ultimately denied, the widening war that arose from Spain and France entering into the American Revolution created an opportunity for Hodgson to put his expertise to use for the British. Naylor reports that Hodgson circulated plans among the British military for an invasion of Central America up the San Juan River.<sup>501</sup> Unfortunately for Hodgson, British officials did not dispatch him to the Caribbean until early 1782, well after the campaign to take Nicaragua failed. Nonetheless, authorities placed Hodgson, now a colonel, in charge of an expedition designed to provide relief for British forces in the Caribbean. After dropping off provisions for forces in Black River, Hodgson made his way to Bluefields where he spent the remainder of the year gathering intelligence on Spanish movements and plotting another plan for a British invasion of

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<sup>499</sup> Karl Offen, "Mapping Land Politics on the Mosquito Shore" Accessed 25 June 2013

[http://www.brown.edu/Facilities/John\\_Carter\\_Brown\\_Library/1%20found%20it%20JCB/apr2010.html](http://www.brown.edu/Facilities/John_Carter_Brown_Library/1%20found%20it%20JCB/apr2010.html)

<sup>500</sup>Naylor, *Penny Ante Imperialism*, p. 59-60; For more on Hodgson's conflicts with the settlers, see Frank Griffith Dawson, "The Evacuation of the Mosquito Shore and those that Stayed Behind, 1786-1800" *The Americas*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (July 1998), p. 81-82.

<sup>501</sup>Naylor, *Penny Ante Imperialism.*, p. 61.

Central America.<sup>502</sup> In January of 1783, as Hodgson scouted the Atlantic coastline off the coast of Portobelo, Spanish guarda-costas based in Cartagena captured the ship he was on and brought him (along with many maps, letters, and papers) to colonial authorities in Santa Fe de Bogota.<sup>503</sup>

Robert Hodgson's capture by the Spanish at the tail end of the American Revolution signaled an opportunity to Spanish officials in Nueva Granada to solidify Spain's position along the coast. The unexpected turn of events also presented the captive Hodgson with an opportunity as well. As they assessed their new prisoner, officials in Nueva Granada quickly found Hodgson cooperative with their investigations. The archbishop-viceroy of Santa Fe, Antonio Caballero y Góngora, wrote that Hodgson was "enterprising, intelligent and whimsical to the same extent ambitious."<sup>504</sup> Moreover, the materials found on board with Hodgson convinced the captors that Hodgson had the skills and training necessary to produce accurate information about coastal settlements.<sup>505</sup> Finally, Spanish officials believed that Hodgson's personal and business connections to Mosquito leaders could prove useful if Spain moved to colonize the Mosquito Coast. It is likely that Hodgson knew that Britain's defeat would portend a change in British

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<sup>502</sup> Sorsby, drawing from many letters between Hodgson, Lawrie, and other officials, provides the best accounting of Hodgson's time in London as well as the plans he made to return to the Caribbean. Sorsby, *The British Superintendency* pp.269-285

<sup>503</sup> Like other instances, historians disagree on Hodgson's motives for being near Panama. Dawson suggests that Hodgson may have been en route to Jamaica to conduct business, "The Evacuation of the Mosquito Shore", p. 82 but Bassi argues that Hodgson was spying.

<sup>504</sup> Romero Vargas, *Las Sociedades*, p. 109

<sup>505</sup> Sánchez Pedrote, notes that the Spanish governor in Portobelo reported that Hodgson had with him various maps and depth charts of the rivers and coastlines of Guatemala and Nicaragua, correspondence with the British Secretary of State, and a book with observations on the coasts of Guatemala, the Mosquito Coast, Mexico, and Buenos Aires. Sánchez Pedrote, "El coronel Hodgson..." p. 1212 They were also worried that if this information found its way to the British it would be disastrous for Spanish. Bassi, "Turning South", p.118. The Spanish made translated copies of all the maps, of which thirteen can be found in AGI, MP-Guatemala, 331-342.

settlement of the Mosquito Coast. If the British agreed to evacuate the coast, it would leave Hodgson, who held considerable property there, impoverished and unable to use his connections and experiences for personal or political advantage. By the end of his captivity, Hodgson either offered to or was recruited to work for the Spanish. In September of 1783, Spanish authorities released Hodgson in a prisoner exchange near the end of the war.<sup>506</sup>

The 1783 Treaty of Versailles and the later 1785 Convention of London finalized the question of the remaining British settlements in Central America. British authorities agreed to evacuate all settlements in Central America except for the territory known as Belize by 1787.<sup>507</sup> At this time, Hodgson communicated to the Spanish viceroy in Nueva Granada his plans to “subjugate and reduce” the Indians of the coast for the Spanish. His proposal followed three main themes: 1) politically divide and separate the Zambos, Mosquitos and Indian-Mosquito; 2) use gifts to wean the inhabitants of the coast off British goods and to begin to cultivate desires for Spanish manufactures; 3) exploit the differences between the Mosquitos along the coast and the native populations in central Nicaragua.<sup>508</sup> In return for his services, after swearing loyalty to the Spanish Crown in a ceremony in Cartagena in March of 1787, Spain offered Hodgson a position as colonel in the military and gave him authority to administer the southern Mosquito Coast on Spain’s behalf.

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<sup>506</sup> See, Archivo General de Simancas (Hereafter, AGS), SGU, Leg. 6945, 1 “Situacion de la costa de Mosquitos” f. 51 and Sánchez Pedrote, “El coronel Hodgson”, p. 9.

<sup>507</sup> Although the Convention of London permitted British subjects to stay, “2,650 English settlers, slaves and dependants”—virtually all of them—decided to leave. Dawson, “The Evacuation of the Mosquito Shore” p. 68

<sup>508</sup> See Romero Vargas, *Las sociedades del Atlantico*, p. 114; AGCA, A1.12.7 Exp. 53.642, Leg. 6056; and AGS, SGU, Leg. 6945, 1 “Situacion de la costa de Mosquitos” and AGS, SGU, Leg., 6949, 5 “Pacificacion de indios Moscos”

From his home in Bluefields, Hodgson set about to increase Spanish authority, and enrich himself at the same time. In order to establish—and then maintain—friendly relations with the Mosquito, Hodgson and other Spanish authorities along the coast, continued the long-standing tradition of gift-giving and awarding foodstuffs to native peoples. Tompson notes that the distribution of food and other essentials dates back the the British period and Mosquito leaders pressured the Spanish to continue the practice. This included the issuing of almost daily food rations to native peoples living in areas that Spain planned to colonize. Spanish authorities also allowed Hodgson to continue to operate as a trader on the coast. Hodgson’s prior trading experience and business contacts in English-speaking ports helped Spain maintain the flow of goods into and out of the region and, because there were no virtually no competitors, allowed him to profit handsomely.<sup>509</sup> Hodgson also continued his dealings in illegal trade by importing non-Spanish goods and by using his position of authority to bypass Spanish regulations. For example, Hodgson began to develop trade directly with Granada by shipping unregistered (and thus, untaxed) goods up the San Juan River. During an unannounced inspection of Bluefields, the royal engineer Antonio Porta Costas, found that Hodgson has over 200 slaves working for him in log cutting operations and regularly shipped wood, tortoise shell, gums, and animal skins to Bristol.<sup>510</sup> Spanish officials tolerated his participation in illegal activities because they feared that by upsetting Hodgson they would lose the hard-won support of the Mosquito leadership who, Spanish officials believed, trusted Hodgson

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<sup>509</sup> An Irish trader by the name of Colville Cairns, who lived on one of the Bocas de Toro islands, and who had expressed some interest in working with the Spanish in the subjugation of the Mosquito, died in 1788. Romero Vargas, *Las sociedades del Atlantico*, p. 116.

<sup>510</sup> Dawson, “Evacuation of the Mosquito Shore”, p. 84.

above any Spanish official.<sup>511</sup>

The most critical aspect of Hodgson's job was to facilitate and develop a positive relationship between Mosquito leaders and Spanish authorities. Hodgson's contacts among the local populations allowed him to host important leaders at his home in Bluefields. In June of 1787, ninety Mosquito leaders and their dependents met at Hodgson's home, including the Mosquito King George. Hodgson reported to the viceroy of Nueva Granada that at these meetings he impressed upon the Mosquito chiefs that the Mosquito could have just as good of a relationship with Spain as they had with Britain and tried to quiet their fears of change. Principally, the Mosquito leaders were concerned with the continued access to goods that they had grown accustomed to having under the British and pressured the Spanish not to limit their economic activities such as turtle harvesting and raiding. Hodgson also assisted the Spanish in their attempts to foster lasting personal, religious, and institutional links to the Mosquito by accompanying Mosquito delegations to Spanish territory. In October of 1787 Hodgson led three Mosquito subordinates to Cartagena for a diplomatic meeting where high-level Spanish diplomats tried to persuade the reluctant Mosquitos to remain on friendly terms with the Spanish.

The following year, 1788, marked a series of diplomatic victories for the Spanish and Hodgson in their attempts to win over the Mosquitos. In June, he accompanied King George, Admiral Dilson, and Governor Briton to Nueva Granada so that they could meet with Viceroy Caballero y Góngora. Spanish authorities showered the Mosquito leaders with gifts. Nineteenth century historian García Peláez writes that the Mosquito envoys were "treated with great kindness in hospitality, food, and clothing" while they were in

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<sup>511</sup> Romero Vargas, *Las sociedades del Atlantico*, p. 118-199.

Nueva Granada.<sup>512</sup> In addition to diplomatic meetings, Governor Briton took the important—and highly symbolic—step to become baptized. Caballero y Góngora performed the ceremony in Cartagena’s cathedral, where Briton took the name Carlos Antonio de Castilla. In a subsequent ceremonies, Church officials confirmed him and baptized his son.<sup>513</sup> Later that year, Spanish religious and military officials in León helped Briton celebrate his marriage with fireworks, bullfights, and parades.<sup>514</sup> The Spanish happily obliged, hoping to cement their dealings with an influential Mosquito leader.

Beyond diplomatic motivations, Briton had personal reasons for his baptism and Church-sanctioned wedding. Briton’s religious conversion had come at the instance of his wife, María Manuela Rodríguez, and had been a long time in the making.<sup>515</sup> Accounts from missionaries in Nicaragua indicate that Briton had become infatuated with Rodríguez, a fifteen year old girl and one of the captives from the 1782 raid on Chontales (she was ten years old at the time of her capture). According to the priests, Briton desperately wanted to take her as one of his wives (he had four others) but the young Spanish girl insisted that he become Catholic before he be allowed to marry her. After Briton’s baptism—and after Catholic officials proclaimed that his previous marriages were not marriages at all—the marriage took place.<sup>516</sup>

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<sup>512</sup> García Peláez, *Memorias*, p. 116.

<sup>513</sup> Doug Tompson, “Establecimientos Costeros”, p. 166. He also had one of his sons sent to Spain to receive instruction in Spanish and to continue his religious studies. Claudia Garcia, “Interaccion etnica y diplomatica...” p. 111 and Floyd, *Anglo-Spanish Struggle*, p.176

<sup>514</sup> Weber, *Barabaras*, p. 243. Floyd also records that the other people captured in the 1782 raids were returned to Spain. Floyd, *Anglo-Spanish Struggle*, p.176.

<sup>515</sup> Weber notes that Briton was actually baptized twice, Weber, *Barabaras*, pp. 242-243 Also, Claudia Garcia reports that one of Briton’s daughters, Mirabel, was baptized in León by the bishop and her godfathers were Nicaragua’s governor and his wife. Claudia Garcia, “Interaccion etnica y diplomatica...” p. 111

<sup>516</sup> There are a number of accounts which relate the events surrounding Briton’s marriage with Rodríguez. Nineteenth century historians emphasize the girl’s religious conviction in demanding a religious

On the surface, the meetings, wedding, and baptisms offered Spain new hope for its plans for Central America's coast. Indeed, it had only been a few years since Briton himself had joined the British in their campaign in Nicaragua and then led a violent raid on Spanish towns on the Atlantic frontier. The previous century also witnessed the Mosquitos frequently joining up with the British to attack Spanish towns, forts, and shipping, with the Mosquito most recently participating in the British invasion of the San Juan River. Despite the promising signals, the next year saw Spanish reversals on nearly all fronts in Central America and witnessed a deterioration of the fragile relationship between Spain and most Mosquito leaders.

Spain's tenuous control over the Atlantic coast began to unravel after Briton's wedding. Friar Manuel de Barraeta, the priest who investigated and provided the legal basis to overturn Briton's previous marriages, noted that the two Mosquito groups that were supposed to have been sent to live near León and receive religious instruction never arrived. The missionaries assigned to accompany Briton and his wife back to the coast from León, Cristobal Navarro and José Gil Solis, reported a series of troubling events.<sup>517</sup>

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wedding and then her determination to return to the coast as heroic. More recent scholars, recognizing the clear sexual abuse that Rodríguez likely suffered at the hands of Briton, suggest that religious officials in Nicaragua had to pressure her to go through with the wedding in order for Spain to achieve strategic, political, and religious goals. See Claudia Garcia, "Interaccion etnica y diplomatica...", Floyd, *Anglo-Spanish Struggle*, pg. 180, and Weber, *Barbaros*, pg. 242-243 and note 163.. Certainly, the relationship between Rodríguez and Briton was and will remain elusive. Primary accounts from royal and religious authorities relate that both Rodríguez and Briton exercised power within the relationship in a number of interesting ways. As an example of the gendered power relations, Weber relates how during the wedding festivities Briton refrained from drinking rum because he promised his bride that he would drink less. To make sure that he did not imbibe, Briton kept a priest close at hand. At other times, the relationship operated in more ambiguous ways. While historians know that Briton sent Rodríguez to León while he went to Cartagena his motivations are unclear. Did he do it to solidify his economic and political relationship with Spanish authorities or did Rodríguez convince him to do so? As with most topics that deal with the motivations of historical actors, the reasoning for the actions will likely remain unclear.

<sup>517</sup> Floyd mistakenly writes that a José Colina accompanied Briton instead of Solis. Floyd, *Anglo-Spanish*

On their return trip to the coast, the missionaries recorded that Briton received a number of rumors that members of his own tribe were plotting to ambush him and massacre the entire party. As a response, instead of taking the more direct route that would take them along the Bluefields River, Briton instructed his party to take a more northerly route that would take them through the territory belonging to King George.<sup>518</sup> As they descended the Coco River in their dugout canoes, Briton's wedding party came across a threatening scene. Reportedly, King George and a number of armed men had gathered in a clearing and demanded tribute to allow them to pass. Floyd interpreted this action as an unveiled threat and a direct challenge to Briton's authority. The Mosquito King demanded gifts from the Spanish missionaries as well. They gave him two silk handkerchiefs, ribbon, beads, and soap in order to pass.<sup>519</sup>

Once the wedding party got to Briton's coastal home at Tuapí lagoon, the missionaries reported that the promised fiscal and material support from Spanish officials based in the former Black River settlement and from Governor Briton did not appear in the amounts they had hoped. Barrueta relayed to Guatemalan officials that Codina and Navarro had trouble paying the debts they incurred during their service and that Briton had not fulfilled his promise to build a proper church on the coast. After pressure from his wife and the priests, Briton relented and eventually had a crude building built that measured about eighteen yards long. Spanish authorities also signaled disappointment with the missionary orders. They complained that too few Recollects had been assigned to preach to the inhabitants of the coast and the frontier missions. Indeed, despite a

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*Struggle*, 186.

<sup>518</sup> "Auto aprobando el gasto de 200 pesos que invirtio Fr. Manuel de Barroetia en la fundacion del pueblo de San Juan (Provincia de Nicaragua), *BAGG*, Vol. 6 No. 3 (1941) p. 171-193

<sup>519</sup> Floyd, *Anglo-Spanish Struggle*, p. 181.

number of calls from Spanish officials and Bishop Villegas, no missionaries aside from the temporary posting of Navarro and Codina, were forthcoming.

Other troubling signs of the fraying Spanish-Mosquito relationship appeared as well. Weber and Dawson report that Mosquito leaders felt cheated in terms of the types of goods they received from the Spanish.<sup>520</sup> Mosquito leaders complained that Spanish traders did not extend lines of credit nor did they sell the Mosquitos guns, powder, and ammunition.<sup>521</sup> Coastal groups also regarded the Spanish-made goods they received as poorly made and not up to the same standards as the good they had received from the British. The Spanish also began to rework the gift-giving system on the coast. Instead of directly giving the Mosquito the items that they desired, the Spanish implemented a system where they would provide the Mosquito with money which they could use to buy their desired goods at Spanish trading posts on the coast. These measures proved to be unpopular with most segments of the Mosquito nation.<sup>522</sup> Meanwhile, reports indicate that British merchants had begun to reappear along the coast and had started trading with Mosquito groups and foment rebellion. Mosquito groups along the Atlantic frontier blocked shipments of food and materials destined for Briton that the bishop had arranged. Briton reported to Spanish authorities that many of his supporters, including his nephew and other members of his extended family, had rebelled against his authority. Offen has suggested that the Spanish presence along the coast and their closer relation to the more indigenous Mosquito groups upset the balance of power along the coast and incited a Mosquito civil war. He argues that the rebellion against Briton is linked to this and would eventually see the Zambo Mosquitos defeating the more indigenous Mosquito and

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<sup>520</sup> Dawson, "Evacuation of the Mosquito Shore", p. 86

<sup>521</sup> Dawson, "Evacuation of the Mosquito Shore" and Weber, *Barbaros*, p. 203.

<sup>522</sup> Tompson, "The Establecimientos Costeros" p. 176-177.

making them pay tribute.<sup>523</sup>

Eventually, disaffected followers of Briton and the men belonging to Admiral Dilson II (also known as Alparis and was Briton's nephew) took direct action against Briton in Tuapí and Hodgson in Bluefields. Although the exact order of events remains unclear, in June of 1790, Dilson II and his men attacked and killed the isolated Briton. Around the same time, a large group of Mosquitos (some 300-500) gathered at Bluefields and attacked Hodgson's compound. Aided by Hodgson's slaves, the Mosquito ransacked the estate and nearly killed Hodgson's entire family. Traditional interpretations of this event suggest that Hodgson was to be killed as well, but his life was spared on the account of his wife who, as William Pitt's daughter, still held considerable sway among the Mosquitos. Hodgson and his family were forced to flee Bluefields and went to León. After ensuring that his family was safe, Hodgson proceeded to Guatemala to report on the uprising and arrange a counterattack. Unfortunately for Hodgson, he died of sickness (Romero Vargas records that he contracted "bilious diarrhea" a month earlier) on 5 June 1791 before his plan could be put into action.<sup>524</sup> A Spanish investigation carried out a few years later, in 1793, came to the conclusion that Dilson II, at the urging of King George, carried out the killings and led the attack on Hodgson's estate.

The challenges that Spanish administrators faced in the southern part of the Mosquito Coast differed from the northern sector. In the northern half of the Mosquito Coast, Spanish officials attempted to colonize the region from the cape of Gracias a Dios to Trujillo with Spanish settlers. The Spanish Crown sent over a thousand settlers from the Canary Islands and northern Spain to Trujillo. The colonization scheme employed by

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<sup>523</sup> Offen, "The Sambo and Tawira Miskitu", 324.

<sup>524</sup> Romero Vargas, *La sociedades del Atlantico*, p. 106.

the Spanish for the Atlantic coast mirrored other, largely unsuccessful, Bourbon attempts to populate the empire's borders as a strategy to make it more difficult for rival imperial powers to colonize lands in the Americas.<sup>525</sup> Originally, plans called for the colonists to resettle the abandoned Black River (now called Río Tinto) site, repopulate Trujillo and its environs, and three other locations along the coast. Despite finding Black River in an almost pristine state, complete with defensive works, sawmills, sugarmills, and a shipyard, the Spanish settlers generally remained holed up in Trujillo.<sup>526</sup> The tropical climate, disease, different soils, and potential attacks from Mosquitos all took their toll on the settlers. Tompson also notes that the Canary Islanders found the tasks of clearing the land for the production of food too demanding, stating that it was only suitable for "Negroes alone."<sup>527</sup> Unable to cultivate enough food for themselves, the colonists relied on food shipments imported to the region—at considerable expense—that was distributed by Spanish authorities. Many of the disaffected colonists slipped away to other parts of the Audiencia, with a majority heading to the capital.

Hodgson's counterpart to the north, Lieutenant Colonel Gabriel de Hervías, also undertook measures to improve relations with the Mosquito leadership. As he inspected the coastal settlements right before the British departure, Hervías met with the Mosquito King George, who demanded that the Spanish continue the British practice of gifting the Mosquito tools, weapons, foodstuffs, and rum. Hervías agreed to these demands. In order to facilitate the continuation of good relations between the Mosquito and the Spain, he also arranged for a number of the European inhabitants of the coast, including several

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<sup>525</sup> For an example for northern New Spain, see, Weber, *Barbaros*, p. 105-107

<sup>526</sup> Dawson, "The Evacuation of the Mosquito Shore" p. 68.

<sup>527</sup> Tompson, "Dissertation" p. 37, n. 64.

merchants and a doctor, to stay on and help Spain administer the region.<sup>528</sup> These European intermediaries gave Spanish authority some credibility among the Mosquito. However, the advantages that the Europeans brought to Spanish administration were usually frustrated by Spanish regulations that blocked most attempts that sought to legally import English goods to Central America.<sup>529</sup>

Beyond the Spain's use of intermediaries and continued difficulties with the Mosquito, other problems also plagued Spanish efforts in extending their authority all the way to the Atlantic coast. As Tompson, Offen, and others have noted, administration of the Atlantic coast from either Guatemala or León was bureaucratically complicated and fraught with delays. Traversing the terrain was difficult during the best of times; during the rainy season the trails were choked with mud while the streams and rivers ran fast and swift. With inland communication difficult, administering the coastal settlements often fell to the Viceroyalty of Nueva Granada. During part of the year, the currents from South America made it easy for boats to sail up the Central American coast all the way to Gracias a Dios without too much effort.<sup>530</sup>

By 1790, Briton's power and authority had diminished among his people and it was clear that Hodgson's ability to influence Mosquito leaders—especially King George—was overstated. Moreover, Spanish policies designed to appease Mosquito groups largely backfired or proved unworkable. Also, despite the official evacuation of British officials and the majority of the British settlers, the British still held significant sway among the Mosquito leadership through merchants and by unofficially encouraging

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<sup>528</sup> Dawson, "The Evacuation of the Mosquito Shore", pp. 74-80.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid.; Spanish officials were aware of this problem, and attempted to remedy by contracting with British merchants, but it failed to placate the Mosquito. Tompson, "The Establecimientos Costeros" p. 170

<sup>530</sup> Tompson, "Establecimientos Costeros" p. 161-162.

Mosquito leaders to remain antagonistic towards Spanish authorities. Despite Hodgson's claim that with his help the Spanish could subjugate and reduce the Mosquito, Spain had neither the expertise, willpower, nor proper inducements to make it happen. Hodgson's contraband activities and his style of governance probably hurt Spanish authority too. During his inspection of Bluefields, Porta y Costas described that Hodgson "imagined himself to be a prince of the district and master of the lagoon and adjacent islands."<sup>531</sup> Karl Offen has shown that many Spanish officials thought Spain could never administer the coast. Even before they gained nominal control over the Mosquito Coast, several Spanish authorities recognized that it would be practically impossible for the Spanish to levy taxes on the Mosquito, reign in their collective independence, or reduce the privileges that the Mosquito leadership enjoyed. Mosquito groups had thousands of men they could mobilize, had the British to supply them with weapons, and could retreat into the jungles.<sup>532</sup> The successful challenge to Spanish authority by the Mosquitos and their British allies helped to maintain the large, ill-defined space between the Spanish frontier and the Atlantic coast that continued to be populated by independently affiliated Indians and communities.

## **Conclusion**

As the British and Spanish empires struggled for control of Central America's eastern shore during the eighteenth century, they frequently turned to groups that lived along the Atlantic frontier for military assistance and material support. European powers went to great lengths to formalize these relationships by signing treaties, creating maps,

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<sup>531</sup>Romero Vargas, *Las sociedades del Atlántico*, p. 109.

<sup>532</sup> Offen, "Creating Mosquitia", p. 273.

and designating new officials. Bourbon officials throughout the Americas actively courted individuals by presenting gifts, arranging marriages and baptisms, offering land, and handing out military commissions. Spain also continued to rely on the Church as an instrument to bring them to the Spanish side. After nearly 300 years, Baptism was still seen as an effective as tool of integration and was believed to cement bonds between the Spanish and indigenous groups. Moreover, the idea that baptism held political and strategic value was something well-known to groups outside the domains of the Spanish, extending to Indian and African slaves living along the Mosquito Coast.

A close examination of the ‘spatial stories’ of Spanish officials and indigenous leaders of the Atlantic Frontier and Mosquito Coast reveals three important things. First, the ability to physically move from one place to another was paramount for residents of the region. Although this can be said of any area of colonial Latin America, the degree to which movement was a necessity in Central America bears a closer look. For indigenous groups, most remained semi-nomadic, moving from one clearing along a river to another. Their ability to hunt and gather food depended on their ability to stay mobile. Mosquito raiding parties moved over vast distances to collect tribute, slaves, and other spoils of war while turtle hunting ranged from Belize to Panama. European and indigenous traders needed to move goods (especially salt, metal tools, alcohol, clothing, and gunpowder) through huge river systems in order to make a living. English residents frequently moved back and forth between Jamaica, Belize, and the Mosquito Coast as traders, loggers, and soldiers. The Spanish also required movement. The ranchers operating in the ‘cattle frontier’ that was Chontales drove large numbers of cattle every year to the annual fairs in Guatemala and clandestinely to the English on the coast. Most importantly, entire

communities were made mobile by necessity, as they frequently were moved to new locations after attacks by Mosquito raiding parties or to find better locations. Individuals and groups who could master movement into, out of, and within the Mosquito coast could achieve social, economic, and political prominence.

A second aspect that emerges from the narratives is the European desire to impose formalized structures within the region and the ability of individuals and groups limit their controlling influences or find ways to take advantage of this. De Certeau would call the local response to the overarching political structures “tactics.” For example, Robert Hodgson used the institutions of the British, then the Spanish colonial governments, to his advantage. Using his authority, he was able to carve a sizable territory centered at Bluefields for himself and family, create a far-flung trading network, and amass a considerable amount of wealth.

Finally, this chapter reveals that for individuals, the Mosquito Coast and its hinterlands offered a very fluid 'space' for movement. At its most basic level, we can see the fluid nature of space by the imprecise nature of the term Mosquito Coast/Shore. Its boundaries were difficult to define and there was no consensus. This extends to competing spaces of authority. It took the British decades to realize that the person they crowned as ‘king’ of the Mosquitos held no real authority over other groups, so they created other equivalent titles for other chiefs use. The Spanish, despite having claimed the area as their own in 1503, had trouble extending royal authority into the frontier. Individuals who were comfortable traversing these frontiers had the ability to re-conceptualize the frontier spaces in multiple ways and mold it to fit their current circumstances.

## Conclusion

On 14 June, 1811, citizens of the northern Nicaraguan district of Nueva Segovia gathered together to draft a proposal to the royal authorities in Guatemala City. Those who gathered over the next three days represented the majority of the local elite in the community. Wealthy landowners, merchants, priests, officers in the local militia, and the entire town council filled the local ayuntamiento building in order to sign the petition. Many of the most notable gave individual depositions to add further strength to the department's request. The objective of the letter was to acquire an estanco, a royal privilege, for the community to grow tobacco in the many valleys that surrounded the town of Nueva Segovia. This appeal provides a clear example of the desires of local Creole elites for increased political participation and illustrates how new ideas about the organization and regulation of economies took shape in the early nineteenth century. This appeal also details how a crisis of the Spanish monarchy, in which the Spanish King abdicated his throne at the insistence of Napoleon, brought about new political expressions that, while maintaining faith in the Spanish empire, began to advocate for greater economic and political freedoms.<sup>533</sup>

The citizens of Nueva Segovia hoped that their arguments and recent public displays of loyalty during a period of political uncertainty would compel the government to grant them license to grow tobacco legally. The inhabitants fought hard for the government license, spending a considerable amount of time, money, and effort in generating several hundred pages of letters, appeals, testimonies, and reports over a course of three years. Indeed, the residents strongly believed that tobacco was the only

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<sup>533</sup> This case comes from AGCA A3.13 (5) Leg. 433, Exp. 3242.

way for the area to be economically viable and that tobacco cultivation would elevate the district's prominence within Nicaragua and in turn, create an export crop that could strengthen trade relations between the Audiencia of Guatemala with those of Peru and New Spain.<sup>534</sup>

How the residents of Nueva Segovia framed their argument can shed light on how colonial traditions and institutions struggled to keep up with a changing world. New ideas such as equality before the law and the free use of one's property provided an intellectual basis for the reasoning behind the request as much as the practical reasons as to why the estanco should be given.<sup>535</sup> Not only did the vecinos challenge the wisdom of transporting thousands of pounds of tobacco leaf by mule train from Costa Rica every year, they also questioned the very nature of the Crown's restrictions on economic activities and the legitimacy of the Crown's power over local economic issues. The vecinos of Nueva Segovia sought to gain the privilege of growing tobacco by using two tactics that sought, on one hand, to show the benefits of extending the monopoly's growing area to Nueva Segovia and, on the other, by attacking the monopoly's legitimacy by using new economic ideas that were gaining popularity at the time.

In the petitions, the vecinos named a multitude of reasons why the area should be granted the right to grow tobacco. The main document created by the ayuntamiento gave seven *practical* reasons as to why Nueva Segovia should be granted the right to grow tobacco. First, the petition states that Nueva Segovia possessed an abundance of uncultivated land ready to produce the crop. Second, the quality of tobacco grown in the

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<sup>534</sup> Ibid.

<sup>535</sup> These ideas carried on the reformist philosophy of Charles III and added to it many of the new ideals of the French Revolution. They wanted equality before the law, a centralized government, an efficient modern civil service, a reform of the tax system, the replacement of feudal privileges by freedom of contract, and the recognition of the property owner's right to use his property as he saw fit.

department would, according to supporters, surpass that of Costa Rica's, which "was becoming worse everyday."<sup>536</sup> The third reason why tobacco should be grown was because there were no 'useful' crops could be grown in the terrain. In this case, useful meant a plant that could be sold at market for a profit. Staple crops like maize and grain could be grown in Nueva Segovia with ease; but unfortunately prices for these goods were low enough to deter many farmers from cultivating food. The fourth argument declared that tobacco would provide income for the "many honorable, but poor farmers, who lived in misery with their families because they had no useful occupation."<sup>537</sup> Town officials hoped that by emphasizing the hardship of the *segovianos*, royal officials would consider allowing tobacco to be produced in order to alleviate poverty. The fifth point suggested that tobacco promised to stimulate trade between Nicaragua and other parts of the Spanish Empire, especially New Spain and Peru, because the port of Realejo on the Pacific was only 30 leagues away from Nueva Segovia, rather than the 120 leagues from the Central Valley in Costa Rica. In addition to this point, the document stated that trade with other colonies would be facilitated because of the excellent condition of the roads and bridges between Nueva Segovia and the port.<sup>538</sup> The sixth point argued that it would be more cost-effective to hire guards to protect the tobacco on the short trip from Nueva Segovia to the factorías in Nicaragua rather than paying them to transport the harvest all the way from Costa Rica. This would cut down on costs for the monopoly and consumer. The final point that supporters of expanding tobacco production to Nueva

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<sup>536</sup> This complaint is not a new one. Nicaraguans frequently complained of the poor quality of Costa Rican tobacco. See the second and third complaints in this document.

<sup>537</sup> AGCA A3.13 (5) Leg. 433, Exp. 3242

<sup>538</sup> Indeed, this statement contrasted sharply with the widely-known condition of the roads between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The roads and bridges between the two areas were famous for being washed out during the rainy season.

Segovia made was that when the long trip from Costa Rica was made during the rainy season, the tobacco was frequently ruined with rot and mold. This fact, Francisco Gallendo (a member of the ayuntamiento) stated, “was something that the public knew all too well.”<sup>539</sup>

The vecinos of Nueva Segovia had plenty of cause (the poor quality and a lack of availability of tobacco) and quite a few reasons (accessibility to land, labor, and proximity to markets) to advocate for a royal estanco. Into this mix they also added reasoning based on an emerging 'Liberal' ideology. The influence of philosophy can be seen in arguments that utilize the concepts of equality, liberty, and property owners' rights. In his testimony, the captain of the local militia, Don Vicente Aguero referred to the tradition of equality before the law, which had been recently debated by the Spanish Cortes, the body of government composed of delegates from the Spanish empire that took over responsibilities of the Spanish state in the face of King Ferdinand's abdication. He remarked that because Costa Ricans had the legal right to grow tobacco, then so too did Nicaraguans. While debates about equality usually centered on ideas of citizenship that were usually dependent on race and class, Aguero demonstrates a keen understanding of the debates in Europe and North America. By highlighting the difference between what farmers in Nueva Segovia and Costa Rica could grow, Aguero makes the case that farmers are being treated unfairly based only on geography.

Some other members of the ayuntamiento preferred to be more forward with royal authorities in their use of language that French and American revolutionaries would be familiar with. Don Felix Lopez told the audiencia that the people of Nueva Segovia could do whatever they wanted with their land, because “the sublime politics of Spain allowed

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<sup>539</sup> AGCA A3.13 (5) Leg. 433, Exp. 3242

a man to do so.”<sup>540</sup> Moreover, Lopez claimed that in order to develop and expand the economy, property owners had the right to plant or otherwise work their own land in a manner of their own choosing. While Lopez did not mention it, royal authorities in Guatemala City should have been able to see that his argument mirrored almost exactly what a widely distributed document said. In early 1811 the Royal Consulado de Guatemala (Merchant Guild of Guatemala) published an essay that called on people, but most of all to Indians, to become “useful farmers” and adopt agricultural practices that generated economic wealth. For Lopez, restrictions on what he could or could not grow on his property hindered his ability to be a productive, useful farmer.

While criticizing the monopoly for being inefficient was one matter, attacking the crown’s authority over economic activity was another. Lopez, Agüero, and others insisted that by making these assertions, they were not advocating independence. Rather they saw themselves as law abiding and noted that these ideas were rooted within the laws and traditions of Spain. Loyalty to the imperial system was expressed at the city level too. A series of public displays of loyalty were arranged to show royal officials that, while the district wanted more economic freedoms, it did not want outright independence. In the few months after the abdication of Ferdinand VII, Nueva Segovia, much like Tegucigalpa and Guatemala City, issued official proclamations claiming that Ferdinand was still king. Other symbolic acts followed, but Nueva Segovia’s most important show of loyalty occurred at the end of 1811 and into 1812. It was at this time that major cities in Nicaragua revolted from royal rule and attempted to establish a

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<sup>540</sup> While the Royal Consulado de Guatemala was not explicitly a part of the royal government, it did enjoy the prestige and nearly the authority of a royal council. It was funded nearly entirely from government money and its members often held government posts. For other aspects of the Royal Consulado’s document see, Rodríguez, *The Cádiz Experiment*, pp. 25-26.

republic. Out of the four main cities in the intendancy that rose in rebellion, only the town council of Nueva Segovia refused to take part. In January of 1812 Nueva Segovia provided troops to help retake the city of Granada. While it is difficult to say if the vecinos of Nueva Segovia hoped that their choice to remain loyal to Spain would influence the audiencia's decision on whether or not to grant the tobacco license, it can be regarded as a show of support for the imperial system.

Despite the hard work and well-founded arguments put forth by the vecinos of Nueva Segovia and the recent passage of the Cadiz Constitution recently which expressed that all government monopolies were to be abolished, the new Captain General of the Audiencia, the Spaniard José de Bustamante y Guerra, and the Junta Superior de la Real Hacienda, the body that controlled the policies of the tobacco monopoly, eventually denied their request.<sup>541</sup> Although their appeal ended in failure, what makes this case stand out from earlier attempts by local governments to improve their economic and political standing is how the town council pursued a strategy that both attacked tobacco monopoly's administration and its right to exist. Despite these attacks, the town council also recognized that it would be in their best interest if the community had the tobacco estanco.

The paradoxical position of Nueva Segovia's vecinos is representative of the larger experience of Spain's American colonies during the nineteenth century. The town council and its elite members knew that the tobacco monopoly was poorly run and inefficient. They also knew that if the Crown granted the town the right to produce

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<sup>541</sup> Auze and others in León probably learned about the new constitution at the end of May or beginning of June. The news of the new constitution first appeared in Santiago de Guatemala, in the *Gazeta de Guatemala*, the local news paper, on 23 May. Rodriguez, *The Cádiz Experiment*, pp.105. News of the event then traveled to other areas via merchants and the area's mail service.

tobacco under the monopoly, they would profit handsomely.

Jeremy Adelman has argued that in the lead-up to the huge disruption in trans-Atlantic trade and communication caused by the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, the Spanish monarchy was continually making economic, military, and political decisions that were reactionary and ad-hoc. To many in the colonies, these decisions came off as arbitrary. Adelman also notes that while some historians suggest that the independence movements were a result of a Liberal response to a failed and corrupt colonial system, other scholars see that the goals of many independence movements in Spanish America attempted to re-establish a more conservative version of colonialism.<sup>542</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, both views of modern day scholars are expressed in Nueva Segovia's petition.

In many ways, the split character of independence movements can also be seen in historical interpretations of the Bourbon reforms. On the one hand, as the Bourbons introduced and then began the difficult task of implementing the reforms, colonial populations adopted to the circumstances as best as they could. Some individuals and communities fully complied while others went to great lengths to avoid the new rules. Still others selectively used the new laws to promote and defend their interests. As I have shown in this dissertation, Nicaragua's position as a small and relatively unimportant frontier made achieving all the goals of the reforms much more difficult.

However, unlike the last two decades of colonial rule, which experienced huge swings in governing styles (going from absolutist to representative back to absolutist in just a few years), ideologies (power derived from the king versus power residing in the

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<sup>542</sup> Jeremy Adelman "Commerce and Corruption in the late Spanish and Portuguese Empires" in Kreike, *Corrupt Histories*. 428-460

will of the people), and connections to mainland Spain, the changes during the Bourbon period came more deliberately and were spread out over several decades. Although several of Bourbon initiatives were subjectively applied, the slow pace and the existing entrenched system of old interests meant that reformers had to adapt to local circumstances and allow expressions of displeasure from colonial populations. Notably, these took the form in legal protests, illicit trade, and, occasionally, outbursts of violence.

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