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Breaking the Pax Hispanica: collective violence in colonial Spanish America

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Historians have long been familiar with the concept of a Pax Imperial, a long period of peace and stability following the violent imposition of imperial rule. It is usually attributed to the ability of a large, dominant state to eliminate war among smaller polities and to impose hegemony over subjugated peoples through a combination of coercion and legitimacy. Such a claim might, indeed, be made for Spanish rule in the Americas, where, after the conquests of the early sixteenth century, Spain appears to have inaugurated a 'Pax Hispanica' that endured, with only local interruptions, until the wars of independence in the early nineteenth century. Concepts of imperial peace of this kind are of course vulnerable to many criticisms, not least of which is the fact that, within any 'imperial peace', colonial rule generates multiple forms of violence.[1] The notion of a Pax Hispanica is nonetheless a useful starting point for discussion of collective violence in Spanish America, since it prompts us to enquire into the forms of coercion and violence associated with Spanish colonial rule, to consider how the American experience of violence resembled or differed from that of early modern Europe, and to trace changes in the character and incidence of collective violence over time.

The Pax Hispanica

The Pax Hispanica in Spanish America originated in the overseas extension of forms of violence that were common in early modern Europe, as Spaniards deployed European techniques of warfare to subjugate American peoples and polities whose resources they coveted. Indeed, in the Americas, armed violence – invariably organized by individuals who acted in the monarch's name, rather

than directly by the state – was crucial to the foundation of Spain's empire. First, European weaponry and tactics, unknown to indigenous peoples, gave Spaniards a military edge that enabled them to assert control and establish permanent colonies of settlement, built on systems of coerced labour. Secondly, the economic resources won by Spaniards fed back into Europe, where they provided the means to build state power, finance war, and found a transatlantic empire. This was accomplished with surprising speed: Spaniards overturned the major indigenous states in little more than a generation, and after the 'age of conquest' (*c.*1500–50) the levels of violence generated by the Spanish rush for riches receded. Spaniards rapidly consolidated their control over the main areas of indigenous civilization and embarked on transforming their inhabitants into Christianized participants in a European-style money and wage economy. This inaugurated the American Pax Hispanica, the long period of Spanish rule (*c.*1550–1780) in which Spain's colonies were generally free from significant outbreaks of internal rebellion or warfare.[2]

Explanations of the transition from violent conquest to peaceful domination must take account of several factors, including divisions between indigenous peoples and the compliance of native peasantries accustomed to tribute payment. However, one great transformation made the Pax Hispanica possible: the catastrophic collapse of indigenous populations. The large, peasant-based societies of Meso-America (especially modern Mexico and Guatemala) and South America (principally modern Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia), all suffered from vertiginous demographic decline during the sixteenth century, caused by successive epidemics of Old World diseases to which native Americans had no immunity. And, as native numbers fell, resistance to Spanish rule was weakened by the destructuration of indigenous communities, the elimination of traditional leaders, and the willingness of native elites to accommodate to Spanish rule and accept Christianity.[3]

The accommodation between European invaders and native peoples was facilitated by the politico-legal system developed by the Spanish Habsburgs. Rather than allowing conquerors and early settlers to turn themselves into a quasi-feudal nobility, the crown sought to establish itself as ruler and arbiter of two civil spheres: the *república de españoles* and the *república de indios*. In the latter, the 'indios' were treated as natural subordinates, who had to pay tribute, adopt Christianity in place of their own beliefs and customs, and accept a subordinate position in the Spanish political and social order. However, 'Indians' were also given compensating rights: they held their own community lands, came under the authority of their own *caciques* (indigenous community leaders), and could appeal to the Spanish judicial system for protection and justice.

This royal policy of seeking to preserve indigenous societies within an 'Indian commonwealth', segregated from that of the 'Spanish commonwealth', was imperfectly realized. By the early seventeenth century, the indigenous people were increasingly integrated into the Spanish world of commerce and production,

while whites and mestizos encroached on indigenous communities. Nevertheless, the persistence of indigenous communities with their own resources and autonomous forms of government was a vital element of the Pax Hispanica. For, although Native Americans continued to endure coercive exploitation from expansive Hispanic settler societies, the implicit 'colonial pact', by which they accepted royal government and Christianity, provided a strong basis for social peace.

This stood in strong contrast to conditions in early modern Europe. For, at a time when popular unrest took on unprecedented proportions in Europe – in protests against landlords, seigneurial dues, and church tithes, further fomented by the effects of war and growing religious divisions[4] – social and political frictions in Spanish America were restrained by both the effects of demographic disaster on indigenous societies and their leaders' acceptance of a 'colonial pact'. Moreover, the Habsburg monarchy not only secured loyalty among indigenous societies by providing some protection against unrestrained settler exploitation, it cultivated stability by other means too. By blocking the formation of a seigneurial nobility in America, the crown forestalled the development of a sociopolitical group that was a frequent cause of disruption and violence in European societies; by actively supporting the Christianization of Amerindian peoples, it further strengthened the foundations of social peace. For, while forced conversion was sometimes a source of conflict, the ability of Indian converts to adapt their own beliefs to a Christian framework, and clerical toleration of such syncretism, allowed the Catholic Church to impose an overarching religious unity, without the sectarian divisions of Reformation Europe. Indeed, the Church was central to the Pax Hispanica: the village church was a more characteristic feature of the landscape than forts or walled towns, and the parish priest a more effective agent of domination than the Spanish soldier or urban official.[5]

Violence within the peace

The Pax Hispanica was, however, always incomplete. For, while rare in Spain's colonial heartlands, war and rebellion persisted on frontiers where independent Amerindians resisted settler encroachment. Resistance was particularly robust among peoples who had not been previously conquered, were not accustomed to paying tributes to a ruling elite, and/or had a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle that made them less susceptible to attack and subjugation. Such peoples mounted powerful resistance in several regions (northern Mexico, on the Colombian and Venezuelan coasts, in the Amazon basin, the eastern Andes, and southern Chile), where new groupings emerged over the long term, in 'tribes' formed by peoples who changed their social organization in response to the European invasions, chiefly by becoming more organized for war.[6]

Violence on frontiers was never eradicated from Spanish America. It continued throughout the colonial period, particularly in the Mexican north and on

Amazonian and Patagonian frontiers, where indigenous groups rebelled against Spanish settlement and engaged in raiding wars. On the whole, however, frontier wars tended to become less frequent where the Spanish state encouraged strategies of accommodation with indigenous societies, often using missionaries as intermediaries, or accepted coexistence with independent peoples who were sufficiently strong to resist domination or assimilation. Across the eighteenth century, Bourbon ministers encouraged such strategies throughout Spanish America, particularly in areas where they feared that native peoples might form offensive alliances with foreigners, and their approach tended to curb violence on several important frontiers.[7]

If the emergence of a 'colonial pact' was one crucial element of the Pax Hispanica, the impermeability of Spain's colonial heartlands to war with foreign powers was another. The competition among dynastic states that was such a potent cause of war in Europe had some repercussions in the Americas, especially when the Dutch and other Europeans sought to capture Spanish-American trade and follow Spain's colonizing example. However, because they generally moved into regions where Spanish settlement was thin or non-existent, their intrusions did not necessarily lead to war with Spain's American subjects. Indeed, although foreign colonies were sometimes used as platforms for assaults on Spanish-American territories, French and English settlers were generally more likely to go to war with indigenous peoples than with Spanish colonials. Even in the eighteenth century, when war between European powers increasingly spread across the Atlantic, Spanish America was far less exposed to the destructive effects of war than the British and French colonies in North America and the Caribbean. Concentrated mainly in the continental interiors of North and South America, most of Spanish America's peoples were safely insulated from the effects of external attack, thanks to the protections of geography and the inability of foreign enemies to penetrate inland.

What of violence within Hispanic colonial societies, away from its frontier peripheries? Our knowledge of the forms of intra-community and interpersonal violence is sparse, but sufficient to suggest that it was endemic in peasant communities, where local authorities commonly used physical punishment and where disputes between individuals and within families often involved force.[8] It was also common in urban communities, especially among the poor in large cities, which had high rates of mendicity and vagabondage. Violence against women was widespread too, given the tendency to regard domestic violence as normal and for only rare cases to face legal prosecution.[9] Given the weakness of the state and the absence of effective policing, Spanish-American societies were no doubt violent places, though no more so than their European contemporaries. In fact, Spanish-Americans were less exposed to some of the kinds of violence prevalent in early modern European societies, where conflict among aristocracies, deep religious divisions, and exposure to rapid social change generated greater social frictions.

With regard to collective violence, most of our evidence comes from historical writing in two areas. One, not surprisingly, is the history of slavery, for violence was

intrinsic to slave trading and slave societies.[10] Such violence varied, however, with the scale and character of slave regimes. It was most intense in the large-scale plantations of the Caribbean, where slaves were subject to paramilitary discipline and constant intimidation, and occasionally goaded into violent retaliation. In Spanish America, slavery was on a smaller scale: these were 'societies with slavery' rather than 'slave societies', with slaves dispersed as domestics and artisans in cities and in relatively small concentrations in agriculture and mining. Given these conditions, Spanish-American slavery tended to be less overtly violent than the slave regimes of the Caribbean export monocultures, with their much larger and more volatile slave populations. And, where slaves resisted, they rarely joined in violent insurrections. They rebelled and ran away and sometimes established maroon communities in frontier areas; but they also turned to the king's courts and, in matters of ill-treatment and manumission, frequently appealed to the law against their owners.[11]

Another, much larger context for collective violence was found among the indigenous peasantries and *castas* (people of mixed ethnic origins), who formed the majority populations in most Spanish colonies. Where there were large indigenous peasantries, as in Mexico and Peru, their communities were subject to a predatory triad of *caciques*, landowners, and government officials, who competed for access to their resources, backed by the use or threat of physical force. Villagers defended themselves against abuses in ways comparable to the rural communities of early modern Europe (and other parts of the world), using legal and extralegal means to defend the local 'moral economy'. Such peasant protests typically consisted of small-scale, highly localized riots or revolts which did not challenge government or seek social change, and inflicted limited damage to persons or property.[12] They rarely developed into regional rebellions comparable to those of European regions, mainly because social and political conditions were better. Spanish America did not experience rapid population growth, and agricultural commercialization on the scale of early modern Europe and its peasantries consequently suffered fewer of the stresses found in European societies; Spanish America had no great territorial nobilities to lead rebellion against the king, and its urban patriciates had little cause to disturb a political and social order where they dominated and manipulated crown policy in their own interests. Spanish-American societies were, moreover, largely untouched by the depredations of war and unaffected by the deep religious divisions introduced by the Protestant Reformation in Europe, where competing communities of belief justified violence as a religious duty.[13]

Late eighteenth-century challenges

The Pax Hispanica became more brittle during the eighteenth century, when population growth placed more pressure on village lands. Incidents of village riot and rebellion seem to have multiplied, particularly among the indigenous communities of Mexico and Peru from the 1760s to the 1780s.[14] Such protest generally remained

within the familiar pattern of local riots of the 'moral economy' kind, but in some regions large-scale rebellions challenged the ruling authorities on a broader front. The rebellion of the city of Quito (1765) and the Comunero rebellion in New Granada (1781) were reactions against moves to impose higher taxes and curb local autonomy – in line with Bourbon centralization – and both blended patrician and popular grievances. The rebellion of Tupac Amaru in Peru (1780–82) was also triggered by Bourbon fiscal and administrative reforms, but merged several strands of regional revolt into a great rebellion which spread over a large area of the southern Andes (in modern Peru and Bolivia).

Did these late colonial rebellions challenge the colonial system in an upsurge of collective violence? Not necessarily. Neither the Quito nor the Comunero rebellions involved significant casualties or damage, and both demobilized peacefully. This restraint is best explained in terms of the rebels' limited goals, leadership, and social composition. Their avowed aim was to restore the political and fiscal status quo and their rebellions were conceived within the conceptual framework of traditional Hispanic political culture. Creole leaders used rebellion to defend their political interests against Bourbon reform of the 'unwritten constitution' that allowed them to shape crown policies. Peasant and artisan participants understood their rebellions as defence of a 'moral economy', where targeted violence was permissible in pursuit of legitimate grievances and where escalation was curbed by local patriciates through social networks. The rebels were, moreover, mostly whites and mestizos who accepted Spanish hegemony, rather than imagining an alternative order. Government violence to curtail rebellion was also very restrained, partly for political reasons (Spanish officials sought to conciliate creoles) and partly for practical considerations (military weakness forced officials to negotiate peaceful solutions).[15]

A larger and more violent threat to the stability of the Pax Hispanica emerged in regions where anti-Spanish feelings were aggravated by ethnic and cultural enmities and where Indian leaders offered alternatives to the Spanish system. The rebellion launched by Tupac Amaru in 1780 was the outstanding moment of indigenous anti-colonial resistance in late colonial Spanish America, for, as it developed, it not only ruptured the Pax Hispanica throughout the Southern Andes but also aimed to overturn the existing structures of Spanish rule. Tupac Amaru (an acculturated, mixed-race cacique who claimed direct descent from Inca kings) was at the heart of the insurrection, as both an actual and symbolic leader, but the rebellion had several distinctive regional strands, involving indigenous communities in different socio-economic and cultural environments. One, led by Tupac Amaru himself, was of Quechua-speaking peoples in the region of Cuzco, the historic centre of the Inca state; the second, led by Tupac Katari, involved Aymara-speaking communities around La Paz; the third, led by Tomás Katari, was among Aymaras around Chayanta.[16]

These rebellions vividly exposed the potential for widespread violence in societies where native peoples were conscious of ethnic identities and had a tradition

of asserting community rights against intruders. Tupac Amaru initially aimed to impose his authority by making alliances with creoles and mestizos in Cuzco and capturing the existing system of government; when this failed, he emphasized his right to kingship, invoked myths of the Inca past, and encouraged his followers to violence aimed specifically against Spaniards and related enemies.[17] The upsurge in violence was particularly marked in the rebellion led by Tupac Katari, who drew on Tupac Amaru's symbolic authority but went much further. He and his followers explicitly aimed at the extermination of 'Spaniards' (anyone deemed Spanish by language, dress, and custom); they justified killing on the grounds that Spaniards were impure Christians or heretics; and they used methods of violence (ritual beheading, drinking of victims' blood, mutilation of bodies) that departed from European norms of war.

These extremes of violence reflected deep cultural divides. Like the peoples of the Cuzco region, the Aymaras had a long history of cultural resistance to Hispanic domination and their rebellion reflected an ongoing struggle to defend their local communities against Spanish and mestizo encroachments on their resources and systems of leadership. They were, however, more inclined to violence against whites and mestizos for social and cultural reasons. As their communities were often isolated from Hispanic society and culture, they preserved more of their own cultural norms, including rules which justified unrestrained violence in war. This cultural separation made it easier to regard whites and mestizos as aliens rather than neighbours, and, together with different rules for war, led peasant insurgents to demonize and exterminate those they regarded as 'Spaniards'. Nevertheless, despite its apparent ferocity and unusual features, such violence was not shaped solely by Aymara culture; it was also retaliatory, imitating Spanish use of murder, massacre, torture, and public execution to instil fear among the enemy.[18] Indeed, the rebellions all showed the degree to which indigenous communities had absorbed Christian religious beliefs and European ideas of governance and aimed to turn Spanish institutions to their own advantage, rather than merely tearing them down.

If the Spanish-American rebellions of the early 1780s suggests that the Pax Hispanica was becoming more fragile, they did not develop into secessionist civil wars – unlike the concurrent American Revolution (1776–82) – nor did they inflict lasting damage on the monarchy. However, although restored to equilibrium after the great rebellions of the early 1780s, the Pax Hispanica was increasingly threatened by the repercussions of 'globalized' European war, especially after the Seven Years' War, when Spain suffered the humiliating loss of Havana to British attack in 1762. To cope with the threat, ministers tried to reinforce American defences by reforms designed to enlarge and improve Spanish-American defences.[19] These were, however, more impressive on paper than in practice. American defences were manned by ill-trained, inexperienced regular troops, supported by a system of militias that was rarely activated and had no culture of arms comparable to those

found in early modern European societies. When British military forces invaded Buenos Aires in 1806–07, they were ejected, not by the regular army or disciplined militias under government orders, but by forces spontaneously organized by urban corporations.[20] Here, then, was a situation where the Pax Hispanica, however stable internally, was highly vulnerable to external shocks emanating from European interpower rivalry.

The disintegration of the Pax Hispanica and the propagation of collective violence

The situation in which Spain's American subjects were mostly unaffected by war began to change around the turn of the century, as Spain was drawn into the convulsions caused by the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. At first, American loyalty seemed strong. There were few signs that the empire faced any serious internal threat; indeed, British-backed attempts to provoke uprisings in Venezuela and Buenos Aires in 1806–07 failed to attract local support. International conflict was, nonetheless, to overturn the Pax Hispanica. In 1808, Napoleon's invasion of Spain and usurpation of the Spanish throne caused massive upheaval on both sides of the Atlantic, in a series of political and military shocks that generated violent conflict throughout Spain's realms.

In Spain itself, the shock was felt immediately, as Spaniards rallied to the deposed King Fernando VII, established juntas (regional provisional governments which claimed sovereignty in the king's absence), and mobilized troops against the French occupation. Repercussions soon registered in Spanish America too, as colonial elites turned towards self-government to escape from the collapsing Spanish state, first in 1809, then much more widely in 1810, when the demand that royal officials transfer their power to juntas became widespread. Royal governments were pushed aside throughout much of South America (in New Granada, Venezuela, Chile, and Río de la Plata, but not Peru) and replaced by juntas which proclaimed their autonomy. In Mexico, political pressure to establish a junta in Mexico City failed, but then shifted to the provinces, where creoles incited popular insurrection to secure their goal.

Throughout Spanish America, the widespread rejection of Spain's authority in 1810 was the result of imperial crisis rather than its cause, and at first the Pax Hispanica seemed set to survive the convulsion at the monarchy's centre.[21] In most South American cities, members of the social and political elites used the ancient institution of the *cabildo* (town council) as a vehicle for taking power from royal officials, and they generally achieved this in 'velvet revolutions', where force played little part. Their juntas did not immediately declare secession from Spanish rule; many creoles hoped for a peaceful realignment, in which they would exercise greater power while retaining connections to Spain. Spanish governments, too, hoped to preserve peace in the colonies, and when the Cádiz Cortes convened in

late 1810, it sought to win creole loyalty by promising representation for Americans in the elected parliament of a constitutional monarchy.

This situation contrasts sharply with the circumstances of British American rebellion in 1776. When North American rebels challenged Britain, they declared independence, founded a unified government, and declared themselves a sovereign power with a right to make foreign alliances against Britain; they also immediately set about creating an army and navy to fight the British on land and sea. The Spanish-American juntas were more tentative. They claimed sovereignty in 1810, but were not openly or unequivocally committed to independence and had no reasons to see war as the inevitable outcome of their break with Spain.[22] The creole elites might have harboured enmity towards European Spaniards and dislike of the Bourbon monarchy, but many were reluctant to enter on a path to civil war, given they saw themselves as belonging to a shared Hispanic political and religious culture in which reconciliation was both desirable and possible. Indeed, the Spanish-American elites had grown accustomed to negotiation with the royal authorities during the long Pax Hispanica, and this tradition encouraged belief in a negotiated resolution of political differences. Moreover, they had little to fear from Spain's military power in 1810. Unlike the Anglo-American rebels of 1776, who had confronted Europe's leading naval power, capable of shipping large field armies across the Atlantic, imposing blockades and moving troops between theatres of war, the Spanish-American rebels of 1810 faced a metropolitan power enfeebled by international and internal war, with an inadequate navy and defeated armies.

Spain's military weakness did not, however, preclude colonial war. For, although Spain lacked the means to launch military expeditions across the Atlantic, warfare broke out in regions where the defenders and opponents of Spanish rule both had the means to fight each other. In both Mexico and Peru, the viceroys retained control of regular forces and militias and used them as a base for building counter-revolutionary armies. In other places – Venezuela, Upper Peru, the River Plate, and southern New Granada – small regular forces divided between opposing sides, and both royalists and juntas sought to supplement them by wider recruitment among citizens.[23]

In the opening stages of the internal wars that began in 1810–11, the contenders adopted conventional military methods and their violence was restrained. The first wars in Venezuela and New Granada were driven mainly by the juntas of leading cities (Caracas, Bogotá, Cartagena), which mobilized forces to impose their authority on the regions where they claimed to inherit sovereignty from the old regime. Similarly, the junta of Buenos Aires sought to extend its authority over the regions of the former viceroyalty of Río de la Plata, by internal military operations aimed at winning provincial support for the repudiation of Spanish rule. Commitment to violence tended to be cautious in these early stages, when the contestants were clashing with their own kind. The juntas' early military campaigns were essentially 'civic wars', based on forces raised in rival cities, rather than wars of secession aimed

directly against the metropolitan power. These were wars where force was deployed to project power and win support, rather than to destroy the enemy.[24]

Urban collective violence was rare, as it had been under the Pax Hispanica. In some cities the 'mob' played a part in removing royal authorities when the advocates of juntas brought crowds onto the streets. Crowd activities of this kind were, however, usually choreographed by leading citizens who sought to pressure royal officials into resigning, while also showing that they acted in the name of the 'people'. This never involved the kind of violence associated with urban crowds during the French Revolution, where leaders used terror as an instrument for political mobilization and radicalization. In fact, if violence affected cities, it was more likely to result from attacks from outside the urban precinct than from uprisings within it.[25]

Restraints on collective violence weakened, however, where popular rebellion occurred in rural areas, among Indian and mixed-race peasants for whom political conflicts provided opportunities to express their own grievances and defend their own interests. The outstanding example of popular violence springing from the crisis of Spanish government was the Hidalgo rebellion in Mexico (1810–11), which erupted in the Bajío, a region afflicted by both short- and long-term economic problems. Hidalgo and his creole co-conspirators planned to raise provincial militias against the viceroy's government in Mexico City, but, on failing to win sufficient support, sought to build a popular 'army' by raising rural insurrection. Hidalgo marshalled tens of thousands of followers (perhaps as many as 60,000) for an assault on the capital, but when it failed, his forces were crushed by a royalist army. Violent insurrection was not erased, however, for it retained a strong following among Indian villagers, and under other leaders turned into a decentralized rural insurgency that continued to challenge the authorities for another decade.

The insurgency revealed the fragility of the Pax Hispanica in Mexico in much the same way that Tupac Amaru's rebellion had in Peru, decades earlier. At its heart lay peasant rebellion, driven by Indian villagers intent on defending the economic and cultural integrity of their local communities and who behaved in ways familiar from traditional local riots and revolts.[26] Nonetheless, like the Andean rebellion, the Mexican insurgency differed significantly from the protests of the past. In size and geographical reach, it was on a new order of magnitude; its social impact was also unprecedented, as both insurgents and royalists drew on support that cut vertically through the social hierarchy. Mexico's insurgency was, moreover, a war which blended conventional and guerrilla warfare, particularly under Morelos, who managed to build an army and an alternative government and, albeit briefly, to create a revolutionary situation.[27]

If internal war was new to Mexico, so too was the character of the violence that it propagated. As rebellion spread through the countryside, peasant rebels not only deposed local authorities and attacked property, but also gave vent to a violent Hispanophobia, expressed in assaults, murders, and at times massacres of whites,

especially the hated *gachupines* (European Spaniards). This Hispanophobia was fuelled partly by economic grievances against landowners and merchants, but also drew on a deep sense of cultural difference. Like the Tupac Amaru rebels, Mexican peasant insurgents perceived Spaniards as different beings, who were true to neither king nor religion and were therefore justly attacked and slaughtered.[28] This created a climate of fear, fuelled by government propaganda that portrayed the rebels as a horde of ignorant and brutal 'indios' who threatened to overturn the social order.[29] Thus the lines were drawn for war between not only political opponents, but also between 'civilized' urban Mexico and the 'barbarous' indigenous countryside, a combination which made for a particularly violent counter-insurgency. And, of course, the very nature of rural insurgency and guerrilla war lowered inhibitions on violence. Insurgents and bandits raided towns, estates, and trade routes from bases in inaccessible terrain, attacking civilians as well as soldiers, and draining local economies of men and supplies. Royalist commanders retaliated by conducting campaigns of terror among civilian populations in order to isolate insurgents and starve them of supplies, while organizing campaigns, reminiscent of those used by French troops against Spanish guerrillas, to hunt them down with 'flying columns' of dragoons who gave and received no quarter.[30]

The wars of the Mexican insurgency were deeply disruptive, socially and politically. For the first time in its history, the viceroyalty of New Spain was swept by forces that not only unleashed armed violence, but also disrupted economic life, cut communications, and turned cities into places of refuge. The spread and destructive potential of such violence was limited by the 'localocentric' character of village insurgency and the inability of creole leaders to create an effective army, but it was, nonetheless, very difficult to eradicate. Deeply rooted in some areas, the rural insurgency persisted under leaders for whom it became a way of life, along with a government counter-insurgency which also became embedded. While the insurgents continued to raid and plunder, soldiers in royal armies, who were often unpaid and poorly supplied, lived off the towns where they were stationed. Indeed, in an increasingly militarized society, royalist officers used their power for personal profit, turning royal government in the provinces into corrupt military satrapies, where the law of force carried greater weight than the force of law.[31]

In the Spanish viceroyalties of New Granada, Río de la Plata, Peru, and their adjoining territories, war and its accompanying violence had their own local dynamics and characteristics, some resembling, some differing from, those of Mexico. An obvious difference was that there were no rural insurrections comparable to Mexico's Hidalgo revolt. Instead, political conflicts were initially played out among the social elites, who aimed to avoid disturbance to the social hierarchies they dominated. Nevertheless, where royalist and autonomous governments took up arms against each other, violence assumed an increasingly central role in political life and tended to escalate as each side promoted militarization (i.e. the mobilization of men for war) as the only way to defend or advance their position.[32]

Militarization

The first steps towards militarization took place when both royalist and independent governments sought to strengthen their military capacity, drawing on both existing and unused resources. Some had a core of professional soldiers, inherited from colonial governments, but the opposing forces consisted mainly of men new to military service. And, while political leaders might prefer recruits from the white population, military necessity encouraged them to mobilize among indigenous communities and free people of colour. When Buenos Aires' armies entered Upper Peru, for example, they not only sought to rally whites and mestizos to their cause; their commanders also sought to persuade indigenous communities to reject royalist rule, both by ceasing to provide the royal government with resources and by joining in the fight against it.[33] Elsewhere, the mobilization and militarisation of the populace followed other ethnic contours. Creole leaders in Caracas and Cartagena, for example, engaged *pardos* and free blacks against royalism, while their royalist opponents did much the same, exploiting antagonisms against the rich creoles where they could, even in slave communities.[34]

These processes not only underpinned the establishment of new armies controlled by contending governments, but also stimulated the development of informal forces under local leaders with their own ambitions. An early example of this phenomenon is found in Venezuela, where embattled Spanish officials sought support across a spectrum of social and ethnic groups and harnessed it to counter-revolutionary ends. On the coast, they recruited among poor white farmers, especially Canary Island immigrants who resented rich creoles; they also found allies among free coloureds and slaves who believed they would gain more from loyalty to the king than allegiance to the creoles of Caracas. In the interior, royalists gathered support in the llanos, the tropical plains where mixed-race *llaneros* on cattle-ranching frontiers joined in a royalist insurgency organized by José Tomás Boves, and fought republican armies with devastating effect. Neighbouring New Granada had enclaves of popular royalism, too, notably in the south, where Spanish commanders created forces from slaves and *castas* on the frontiers of Popayán, and where indigenous peasant communities took the city of Pasto in the name of the crown. Though smaller and less militarily capable than the *llaneros* of Venezuela, the rebels who chose loyalism as a means of defending the identities and interests of their communities played a key role in keeping royalism alive in these regions.

Informal forces were equally important to Spain's enemies. While some groups of *llaneros*, led by Boves, fought under royalist banners in Venezuela, others, under José Antonio Paéz, played a crucial part in turning the war against Spain. In the south of the continent, where Buenos Aires engaged in a long war against royalist Peru, frontier areas were also potent incubators of armed mobilization and irregular warfare.[35] Cattle frontiers – where the presence of government, the rule of law, and

the customs of Hispanic urban society were at their weakest – were places that supplied ready recruits for armed conflict. In the Banda Oriental (modern Uruguay) and on the Argentine plains, the communities of cattle drovers and pastoralists known as *gauchos* were soon drawn into Buenos Aires' wars. Successive governments in Buenos Aires sought to militarize these frontier communities in order to defend their borders against Portuguese armies from Brazil and Spanish armies from Peru, and found willing allies. The recruitment of such forces was a double-edged sword, however, for, under leaders like José Artigas and Martin Güemes, they moved from fighting against royalist Spain to fighting for local causes, including independence from government in Buenos Aires.[36]

Slaves were another subordinate group for whom war provided unprecedented opportunities to fight for themselves, especially in areas where pressures from political conflicts destabilized existing structures of power and property.[37] In coastal Venezuela, for example, slaves from cacao plantations responded to royalist commanders who encouraged them to rebel against their masters; on Colombia's Pacific coast, slaves fought to improve their condition by fighting with royalist leaders to secure protections from royal law; in the Banda Oriental and the Venezuelan llanos, on the other hand, slaves were also found among forces fighting against Spain. Wherever slaves fought to change their position in society, they tended to act in consort with others. Those who sided with royalism in New Granada's southern provinces sought connections with royal authorities, offering their allegiance in the expectation that loyalty to the crown would be rewarded by the concession of a legal status comparable to that of Indian communities.[38] Others were pressed into army service by coercion or recruited by promises of freedom: such, for example, were those who formed units of infantrymen in the 'armies of liberation' led by Bolívar and San Martín in their campaigns to end Spanish rule throughout South America.

Elsewhere, slaves were drawn into wars by local leaders and joined informal forces alongside Native Americans and *castas*. Like the maroons, they aimed at escaping from slavery rather than overturning the institution. Nonetheless, where news of the Haitian revolution circulated, radical ideas followed. In Venezuela, for example, it was said that the mulatto leader Manuel Piar intended to use his guerrilla force of blacks and free coloureds to fight for their own purposes, rather than those of the whites, and perhaps even to create an anti-slavery republic on the Haitian model. Slave rebellion of the Haitian kind was, however, hampered by the very different conditions of continental Spanish America. There were no Spanish-American equivalents to the French colony, with its very large population of plantation slaves, its many first-generation Africans (including some with military skills and experience of war in Africa), and its consequent capacity to fuel large-scale rebellion, to produce autonomous forces of slaves and free people of colour, and to find allies among neighbouring foreign powers looking for advantage over France.[39] The contribution made by slaves to Spanish America's wars differed considerably from that made by slaves in Haiti's revolution. Consonant with

the character of Hispanic slavery, it was more localized, less violent, less physically destructive, and, though it eroded the foundations of slavery, did not bring it to a sudden end.

Where leaders on both sides were able to recruit among the 'people', from whites and 'free coloureds' to 'Indians' and slaves, they enlarged the theatres of war and unlocked reserves of violence which been contained under the Pax Hispanica. The removal of restraints stemmed in part from the character of conflict as civil war, where contestants regarded their opponents as traitors who should be wiped out, rather than as combatants with rights under the rules of war.[40] And, although Spanish America lacked conflicting national or religious identities, violence was often aggravated by ethnic antagonisms. Spaniards routinely regarded peasant rebels as unruly, irrational people, subject to murderous passions, especially if they were Native American. On the other hand, European Spaniards were sometimes singled out for particularly violent treatment, because of their image as social parasites and bad Christians. In Venezuela, European Spaniards were also scapegoated as enemies of the people for political reasons, when Bolívar, seeking to define conflict in terms of American liberation from Spanish tyranny, called for their extermination in a 'war to the death'.

This lethal polarization was particularly noticeable where political contest was strongest and where popular insurgencies and guerrilla wars were led by local men over whom governments exerted little control. Perhaps the most arresting example was that of the royalist *llaneros* in Venezuela, who acquired a singular reputation for ferocity. Boves and his followers fought without quarter, preyed on civilians, and established such a reputation for rapine that thousands fled from their path. Their terrifying image owed something to the personality of their leader, for Boves was a Spaniard driven by hatred for creoles, eager to present himself as the scourge of 'traitors', and ready to inflict extreme punishment on those he regarded as the king's enemies. The violence attributed to Boves's warriors was possibly exaggerated by contemporary commentators, due to the racial composition of his forces and their way of life. In fact, plunder was the usual guerrilla tactic of living off the land, and *llanero* violence was shaped by life on frontiers where the writ of government ran thin.[41] Theirs was an insurrection of poor, mixed-race frontier communities against the creole governments of coastal cities, and they brought the behaviour of semi-nomadic cattle drovers to the practice of war. Here, indeed, in Venezuela, we see the first stirrings of a kind of irregular warfare that was also found among the *gauchos* of the plains of the Río de la Plata. Conducted by *llaneros* and *gauchos* under local leaders, it drew on the experience of communities shaped by life on the fringes of the Pax Hispanica, with tactics and weapons familiar from raiding wars against independent Amerindians and from herding semi-feral livestock. These were rural communities fighting to defend their way of life against outsiders, with little regard for European ways of war or concepts of the nation.

The violence that spread with wars for territory and militarization of the populace was to some extent curbed by the customs of the Pax Hispanica. Although popular pieties might sometimes justify murder and massacres, religious differences neither motivated conflict nor aggravated violence. On the contrary, confessional conflict was absent and contending sides generally showed respect for religion and deference towards the Church. Nor was violence exacerbated by radical fervour of the kind found in revolutionary France: Spanish-Americans did not see their revolutions as the birth of a new man and a new society, and were not converted into cannon fodder for 'total war' of the kind associated with the French Revolutionary wars.[42] On the contrary, citizens were often unwilling recruits with a strong inclination to desert when removed from their home localities. These characteristics helped to check the violence of war, as armies were never long in the field, fought brief battles, and tended to disperse rapidly when faced with defeat. Warfare could be more intense and protracted in fights over home territory, but the damage tended to remain within the local arena, rather than spreading over a larger scale.

Legacy

When Fernando VII was restored to the Spanish throne in 1814, and the insurgents retreated on many fronts, royalists hoped to recover the colonial peace. The Pax Hispanica was irretrievable, however, now that war had been socially embedded in several regions and Spain had revealed its military vulnerabilities. Where forced to retreat, insurgents in Mexico, Venezuela, New Granada, and Upper Peru simply shifted their ground, harassing their enemies from remote areas rather than confronting them in pitched battles. Such warfare gave increasing importance to the local *caudillo*, the politico-military leader who was instrumental in mobilizing local and regional support, and such leaders played key roles in keeping hopes for independence alive. Indeed, from the ranks of the *caudillos* came leaders who, intent on creating new states, built armies geared to fighting on European lines.[43]

In South America, this opened a new phase of war in which politico-military leaders sought to create regular armies based on European models, and declared war against Spain as a foreign power. San Martín's creation of his 'Army of the Andes' and invasion of Chile in 1817 opened this era, a feat that was followed, in 1818–19, by Bolívar's offensive against Spanish forces in Venezuela and New Granada. Their expansion into Spanish-held territories cleared the way for the conclusive stage of the independence wars, in which the armies established by San Martín and Bolívar converged on royalist Peru. Now, with better-organized armies at their disposal, they conducted conventional wars and did battle with Spanish forces in the field. This was a crucial development. They not only defeated Spain's armies, but did so with armies led by men for whom war was a political career, and whose armies were seedbeds for the formation of new states.[44]

However, if war was the crucible for forging independent states, the collective violence caused by prolonged internal wars left a legacy that complicated the transition to statehood. By the time that Bolívar defeated the last royalist armies of Peru and Upper Peru in 1824–25, the Pax Hispanica was already shattered by internal warfare, with multiple and enduring effects. It is difficult to measure the damage done by war, in terms of mortality and damage to economic and social life. But one thing is clear: the rebellions and wars triggered by competing claims for sovereignty had produced an unprecedented rise in collective violence in many regions of Spanish America, mobilized sectors of the population previously marginalized from power, sometimes on a large scale, and destroyed the bonds on which the Pax Hispanica had been based.[45] Violence had become an indispensable instrument of politics, and, after the overthrow of Spanish rule, continued to be used by the elites, old and new, to assert their ambitions and defend their positions.[46] For at least a generation, military chiefs from the wars of independence became prominent political figures, establishing new states, defining their geographical boundaries, and shaping their constitutions. However, unlike the wars of early modern Europe, the Spanish-American wars of independence did not produce 'military revolutions', nor their political corollaries. They had, instead, tended to fragment the political order, dissipate authority, and disperse the control of violence away from the centre.[47] And, now that the Pax Hispanica was finally erased amid intense competition for power, collective violence became a much more frequent feature of political life.

Notes

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