Contested Customs: Reinventing Indigenous Authority in Sixteenth-Century Ubaque, New Kingdom of Granada

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This article examines the transformation of Muisca authority in sixteenth-century Ubaque, a valley in the northern Andes. It examines how two caciques conceived of and practiced their authority vis-à-vis their communities and the Spanish administration. While in the 1560s the cacique enacted his authority by appealing to Indigenous ritual and opposing evangelization, his successor in the 1580s claimed at court that he was a true Christian. Based on these cases, I argue that the Spanish empire's effort to preserve Indigenous groupings that kept to their old customs while making them Catholic created a tense atmosphere and a deep fracture in the mechanics of colonialism that involved not only caciques but also other Indigenous authorities, encomenderos, clergy, and imperial officials and ultimately ended up transforming Indigenous authority.

INTRODUCTION

In December 1563, Ubaque—the leader of a Muisca settlement in the northern Andean highlands that bore the same name—hosted a large feast and celebration in his palisade. Indigenous nobles set off on long journeys to participate in the ceremony. Ubaque's guests sang, danced, worked, and drank

I am deeply indebted to Marta Herrera, Stuart Schwartz, Joanne Rappaport, and Juan Cobo for their support over the years. I would also like to thank Cristina Soriano, Jose Carlos de la Puente, Jorge Cañizares, and the participants of the workshop sponsored by the University of Texas at Austin's Institute for Historical Studies for their feedback, as well as Bridgette Werner, *Renaissance Quarterly* editor Barbara Fuchs, and the two anonymous reviewers for their reading and helpful comments.

Renaissance Quarterly 77 (2024): 1106–1133
doi: 10.1017/rqx.2024.431

maize beer along the long road at his palisade's entrance. Some guests were covered in featherwork, while others were dressed as jaguars and cougars and still others played flutes and shells. The ceremony had several names in the Muisca language, including *iebzasqua* (building place) and *biohote* (drinking together). The Indigenous lexicon used to describe this type of event evoked key metaphors of the human body, politics, and kin structures. It formed part of a vocabulary that allowed people to express their belonging to a cultural and political group.[1] In contrast, the Spaniards called the celebration a *borrachera* (drunken binge) and reclassified this symbolically rich communal feast as an idolatrous cult of the devil. The ceremony repelled them, shocked them, and scared them. They said the dancers and singers at Ubaque "came as demons, horrifying men," and they initiated a legal procedure to eradicate this form of cultural expression.[2]

Twenty years later, in 1583, a new cacique ruled Ubaque. His name was Don Francisco, and he saw himself as a Christian subject. The residents of the city of Santa Fe de Bogotá described him as a gentleman who lived "in Spanish clothing and habit." He dressed in a blue suit and a Spanish cape and hat, and he wore a sword at his waist. By his own admission, his sword and horse were always ready to defend the Catholic monarch from Indigenous revolts. At home, his bed, table, and decorations implied that Don Francisco ate and slept as any other pious Christian in the monarchy's global domains. He attended Mass regularly and punctually, enjoyed reading and writing, was married to a Christian woman named Beatriz, and had two sons whom he described as legitimate. He appeared in the royal tribunal voluntarily with a petition, asking for a change in Indigenous political succession so that his son could be considered the next cacique of Ubaque, after his death.

Hispanic archives include a vivid record of these two caciques' corporeal expressions and behaviors as iterated by Spanish and Indigenous witnesses, revealing that in the second half of the sixteenth century the bodily practices of Indigenous leaders had become a matter of broad concern for imperial authorities—enough so to produce detailed legal documents that described their appearance and their attitude toward Indigenous and Christian ritual. The two legal cases were handled by the Audiencia of Santa Fe de Bogotá—a royal appellate tribunal that aimed to enact the Spanish king's presence in the New Kingdom of Granada (present-day central Colombia)—but both cases entered the historical record through different means. Ubaque's records were part of a punitive campaign led by *audiencia* magistrates' calling witnesses to testify on Indigenous cultural practices, many of them Indigenous people who had come

[1] Herrera Angel, 2005; Henderson.

[2] Londoño and Casilimas. All translations from primary sources are my own.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to celebrate with Ubaque and spoke under threat of punishment.[3] Don Francisco's suit was instead a petition he himself started, in which mostly Spanish settlers spoke to his command of Christian forms of behavior as part of a legal strategy to bequeath his position to his son.[4] *Audiencia* magistrates judged the two cases in opposite ways: they criminalized Ubaque's forms of expression and deemed Don Francisco exemplary. Yet both documents consider how both individuals performed their identities in public, to Indigenous and European audiences.

The archival images of these leaders, emerging from these documents, illustrate how political struggles and contests over the meaning of colonialism unfolded through the category of customs in Ubaque. The mere fact that the two men were described in colonial documents as caciques (leaders or rulers) hints at the many changes Indigenous people in leadership positions in the northern Andes faced after the Spanish invasion in the late 1530s. Cacique was an Arawak term that Spaniards appropriated to identify the leaders of all Indigenous societies. It formed part of a larger colonial lexicon that emerged in the Caribbean and that provided templates for the Spaniards to subsume the different Indigenous cultures and ethnicities under a single category—as *indios*. In this sense, cacique was not a timeless pre-Hispanic position but a transformed figure of authority at the very core of the meaning of colonialism. According to Hispanic law, caciques were local nobles who enjoyed the right to rule their communities while maintaining their traditions and customs (*usos y costumbres*). As such, they were recognized as part of the imperial administrative organization and were designated by the Crown to lead their communities, thus maintaining the political structure of Indigenous communities and facilitating tribute payments. However, the imperial administration also expected to make Indigenous peoples into Catholic vassals of the monarchy who lived pious lives. With this aim, clerics and civil authorities outlawed the rituals, ceremonies, and symbolic languages that created bonds between Indigenous authorities and their communities. This presented a challenge for caciques, who had to navigate this dual, conflicted role and maneuver among Indigenous political cultures, Catholicism, and colonial demands. It also challenged *encomenderos* (Spanish lords), friars, settlers, and officials in asking them to perpetuate a social and political system even as they aimed to destroy it. This article examines the implications of such contradictory principles of Spanish colonialism in the everyday interactions among Indigenous authorities, communities, and colonial agents and settlers.

[3] Londoño and Casilimas.

[4] AGI, *Audiencia de Santafé*, 125, no. 10.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Historians of the early modern Spanish empire have shed light on the centrality of the category of custom to monarchical politics, showing the malleability of a legal and political system that allowed for different self-governing republics to be placed under a common framework. This plural structure emerged in the Iberian Peninsula, stemming from centuries of coexistence among Muslims, Jews, and Christians. Yet the subject of custom was highly debated in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, amidst a radicalization of the adherence to Christianity as the basic criterion for membership in the Spanish monarchy. The expansion of the monarchy unleashed a wave of tensions and negotiations between local customs and imperial control associated to the limits of acceptability in Christian morals. Officials, scholars, and citizens debated on topics ranging from fashion and diet to ritual; they reflected on whether Moriscos could continue to have their own dresses; whether Black people could consolidate their own republics; or whether a modified diet was indicative of prohibited beliefs. In other words, the category of custom condensed a series of discussions about the very nature of belonging to the Spanish monarchy in its global domains.[5]

In the Indies, the ideal of customs also lent itself to interpretation. Scholars have revealed how this political ideal created a distorted vision of the past—the idea of a fixed, motionless Indigenous community that stubbornly stuck to its past customs—and promoted a way of remembering, recording, and displaying the past and claiming indigeneity based on the idea that communities had not changed "since time immemorial." To make their claims at court, the law forced caciques and commoners to adopt this narrative to argue that they were restoring a traditional past, even if they were trying to navigate unprecedented situations and seeking change.[6]

For their part, scholars of the Andes have shed light on the centrality of communal feasts and collective rituals to Indigenous politics and the challenges that new Christian identities posed to communal politics.[7] Furthermore, they have revealed many ways in which Indigenous authorities reimagined their role in a new era under Spanish rule, often using the Hispanic judicial system and even becoming cosmopolitan travelers who crossed the Atlantic to try to garner the king's favor.[8] In this sense, in contrast to the empire's static views of indigeneity, many communities recognized the need for caciques who were able to navigate Hispanic courts, dispute colonial pressures, and litigate in favor of their communities. Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas responded

[5] Graubart; Deardorff, 2018; García-Arenal and Wiegers; Yannakakis, 2023.

[6] Yannakakis, 2023; Herzog, 2021; Cunill and Morgado.

[7] Saignes and Salazar-Soler; Stern; Spalding, 1970 and 1984.

[8] Ramírez; Puente Luna, 2018; Dueñas.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with a fabulous range of expression that played with this static view of the past in ways that did not directly challenge Christianity. In the viceroyalty of Peru and the kingdom of Quito, the Inca became disputed insignia—markers of status and nobility that exempted people from tax burdens—and were often placed in a genealogical framework next to European symbols and embedded in a baroque culture.[9] In Mexico, Indigenous *cabildos* displayed shields of arms with Indigenous glyphs and produced pictorial histories proposing new historical interpretations of Christianity and their communities.[10] In the northern Andes, while less drawn to create deep genealogies highlighting Muisca heritage, many Indigenous groups deployed Iberian notions of past "usos y costumbres" to claim new lands, maintain their authority, or expand their power.[11] Caciques and captains reinvented Indigenous authority as they took on their roles as part of the political setup of the Spanish empire.

This article is a microhistory of the interactions among Indigenous leaders, their communities, Spanish *encomenderos*, friars, and officials in Ubaque. I take the two legal cases presented above and contextualize them with other archival material in order to look deeply into two Indigenous leaders' lives, considering how they conceived of and practiced their authority vis-à-vis their communities and the Spanish administration. I argue that the Spanish empire's effort to preserve Indigenous groupings that kept to their old customs while making them Catholic created a tense atmosphere and a deep fracture in the mechanics of colonialism—how colonial society worked—which involved not only caciques but also other Indigenous authorities, *encomenderos*, clergy, and imperial officials and ultimately ended up transforming Indigenous authority. This process was felt particularly intensely in Ubaque. In the 1560s, the cacique of Ubaque saw opposing Christianity and embracing Indigenous ritual as a viable option not only to rule his community but also to expand his power—with the support of his *encomendero* but to the dismay of imperial officials. This approach to Indigenous leadership is revealing of a wider opposition of Indigenous authorities to evangelization. By the 1580s, after a harsh public punishment of Ubaque, Don Francisco opposed Indigenous ritual, conformed to Hispanic forms, and governed by petitioning to Hispanic courts, resulting in rejection from Ubaque's Indigenous community. Two men serving the same Indigenous community two decades apart chose strikingly dissimilar paths, just demonstrating how contentious Indigenous ritual became. I reconstruct these complex, shifting configurations of power. That Don Francisco performed a Christian identity and ruled by colonial grace does not mean that all his

[9] Osorio; Puente Luna, 2016; Espinosa.

[10] Villella.

[11] Rappaport, 1990; Gamboa Mendoza.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

contemporaries or subsequent caciques did the same. Colonial repression of Indigenous ritual did place limitations on the repertoires available to caciques: after the 1580s, Muisca leaders rarely embraced a stark opposition toward Christianity or appealed exclusively to Indigenous ritual. But Indigenous political culture and spiritual practice remained varied, creative, and unpredictable, and caciques searched for alternative paths to merge or oscillate between Christian and Muisca symbolic languages.

CULTURE, CUSTOMS, AND THE SPANISH EMPIRE

The concept of local custom was central to the development of European law in the late Middle Ages, as jurists of emerging monarchies aimed to codify long-standing local justice procedures that ruled on a case-by-case basis into more-rigid laws that could apply to a larger number of situations. Monarchical officials aspired to amalgamate different local traditions into a single system by conserving these diverse local legal arrangements. However, by transforming justice procedures into laws and putting them in writing, jurists "changed the essence of what village assemblies and jurists did."[12] The Iberian Peninsula had just such a plural legal tradition in which Jewish, Islamic, and Christian people attended their own courts until the late fifteenth century. At that time, the expansion of the Christian kingdoms led to the radicalization of Christianity as the basic condition for the membership to the monarchy, which resulted in the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 and a gradual process of banning Moors from Castile, prohibiting their outfits, and their complete expulsion from the Spanish Crown's domains in 1609. Despite this radicalization of Christian identities, Moorishness, along with its enactment and representation, was formative to emerging Spanish identity.[13] Neither did the Castilian Crown move away from the plural political principles of early modern monarchies. Instead, it adhered to a political ideal of self-governing communities, known as republics (*repúblicas*), that maintained their own laws and traditions of governance.[14] As the monarchy expanded to non-Christian territories across the globe, it extended this political framework, becoming an empire headed by a common king that sought to maintain the governing structures, hierarchies, and customs of local communities. Through this system, the Crown consolidated a plural legal system in which different peoples and territories were subject to different kinds of laws.

[12] Herzog, 2019, 127.

[13] On Moorishness as key to Spanish identity, see Fuchs.

[14] Graubart.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In the Indies, Crown officials annexed Indigenous communities to the empire's domains by distributing them among conquistadors under the encomienda system. By the 1540s, this system was defined in imperial law as a tributary institution: Indigenous communities were forced to pay an annual tribute to the *encomendero*, who was in turn responsible for their evangelization. Indigenous groups were to maintain their "customs" as they became part of the monarchy's setup. In that way, Indigenous communities were to pay tribute in goods they had produced in their own regions since before the Spanish invasion. The Crown sought to identify traditions of governance, corporate structures, local nobles, and tax systems to define their responsibilities toward their *encomenderos* and the Crown. However, the precept of the membership to the empire and the essential argument were the conversion of Indigenous peoples to Christianity, and officials were aware that evangelization projects frequently competed with the maintenance of local customs. In the wording of the law:

> We order and command that the laws and good customs that the *indios* formerly had for their good government and order (*policía*), and the uses and customs they observe and keep since they are Christian, and those that do not clash with our sacred religion or with laws in this book or the new [laws] that have been made, are kept and implemented.[15]

In the Spanish colonial view, Indigenous peoples needed to adopt Christian beliefs and lifestyles. *Indios* were depicted as wretched people who needed special attention from the monarch.[16] Christian thought and customs, as well as any imperial mandates, took priority over Indigenous traditions. This made the empire's approach to customs and colonialism profoundly ambivalent: it aimed to keep local structures of self-governance and justice centered on traditional nobles while exterminating Indigenous religion and cultural beliefs. In practice, the restricted notion of customs in Hispanic law was based on a selective understanding of traditions, which comprised elements like the system of governance, the organization of law, and the tax system. Only those customs that did not clash with Christianity and other imperial guidelines could be maintained.

Caciques were central to this model of politics. They were the purveyors of justice at a local level and were in charge of community governance. The empire progressively developed legislation to govern the behaviors of caciques. Imperial legislation gave them multiple benefits and symbols of distinction in Iberian political culture that were not available to commoners. Their homes would be

[15] *Recopilación*, book 2, title 1.

[16] Assadourian; Owensby; Cañeque; Cunill.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in the central square of Indigenous villages, they could wear European clothing, their names would be preceded by the nobiliary title of Don, in some cases they could have horses and even bear weapons, and their children's education was privileged over that of others in the community. Caciques were supposed to keep justice according to their old means while gathering tribute for the *encomenderos*. They were a key part of the imperial administration—key mediators between their communities and the empire.[17]

In their effort to implement this model of politics, imperial officials and clergy sought to govern Indigenous peoples' daily lives: how they ate, drank, and slept, the criteria that defined who was considered kin, as well as how and with whom they could have sex or build intimate relationships. Imperial officials were often tasked with visiting Indigenous communities to take note of local conditions through an institution known as "visits of the land" ("visitas de la tierra"). During these visits they inquired about the general structure of society, the traditions of succession of rulers, and the amount of taxes the residents had paid before the Spanish invasion. Officials also asked if the residents kept a church with all its ornaments and if the caciques, nobles, and commoners were all baptized, married by a priest, and living with a single wife and their children in a traditional Christian family framework. The expectation was that caciques maintained the same groups and produced the same goods as they had prior to the invasion, while erasing any ritual practice that rivaled the teachings of priests and ensuring that Indigenous peoples were living as true Christians. Imperial legislation assumed that cultural beliefs were superfluous: that caciques could just replace their mode of interacting with their vassals and everything else would remain unchanged.

The political traditions of the Muisca peoples in the northern Andean highlands fit uncomfortably within Iberian expectations of caciques. To reconstruct precolonial Indigenous systems of authority is a difficult, imperfect task that demands a critical reading of colonial sources, sometimes written by Europeans and in other cases by Indigenous peoples. These sources suggest that the Muiscas had diverse layers of governance: the highest authorities were the *Zipa* of Muyquyta (Bogotá) and the *Zaque* or *Hoa* of Tunja, sometimes identified by Europeans as kings or princes. The *psihipquas* and *usaques* occupied a second layer of governance. They were regional leaders who could have thousands of vassals. Spaniards collapsed these divisions into the single category of cacique. Under the rule of *psihipquas* and *usaques* were the *tybas* overseeing kin units ranging from a few dozen people to hundreds. Spaniards called them "captains." These layers of authority were dynamic and not always circumscribed within one another but were subject to different types of bonds.

[17] Díaz Rementería, 1976 and 1977; Yannakakis, 2008.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Psihipquas could respond to the *Zipa* or the *Zaque*, or could be independent, while a *tyba* could respond to two *psihipquas* simultaneously.[18] Their realms were dynamic and subject to changing reciprocal bonds as well as to clashes and military expansion.

Kin formed the basis of political organization structured around a reverence for common ancestors. *Psihipquas*' names, such as Ubaque, Guatavita, or Sogamoso, were powerful, all-encompassing Indigenous concepts that alluded simultaneously to the community, territory, and leader. They followed a matrilineal system in which children belonged to the mother's political unit but resided on the father's lands during his lifetime.[19] Apparently, political leaders at all levels were men, and it was the mother's brother who held political authority in her family's political unit. He was called *guecha*, the man of the house. The *psihipquas*'s nephew—the sister's son—inherited the *guecha*'s authority. He underwent a years-long training in the dark, secluded in a small, sacred house called the *quca*, where he received religious training and kept to a strict diet, at times fasting for prolonged periods. When he left the *quca*, the community received him in a large ceremony. The authority of *psihipquas* was inseparable from this ritual context; they acquired authority inasmuch as they participated in these activities.

These political traditions did not pair well with the Crown's expectations of a colonial cacique. Imperial authorities saw Indigenous political culture as challenging Christian piety and sought to introduce new methods of governance. Although the Spanish monarchy incorporated Indigenous authorities into their imperial organization based on the principle of maintaining Indigenous customs, it nevertheless sought to destroy the symbolic language and cultural practices that gave legitimacy to Indigenous leaders' authority and position within their communities. That conflicted notion of customs—which dismissed Indigenous ritual and political culture—was polarizing and contradictory, because in Indigenous societies, economy, politics, and law did not function separately from ritual and cultural expression. Ubaque's 1563 ceremony reveals these clashes concerning Indigenous custom and culture.

UBAQUE: CRIMINALIZING INDIGENOUS RITUAL

> Facing the entrance of the cacique's palisade was a very long road, of ten or twelve steps of width. . . . The scribe and witnesses saw many *indios* coming through this road chanting and dancing with banners, in a diversity of dresses including masks and nets in their faces[,] *corozas* placed on their heads and

[18] Gamboa Mendoza, 35–190.

[19] Correa Rubio.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> playing flutes and shells and other *fotutos*, as they say in their language, chanting painful chants in their language in such a way that it could not be understood, even by those who understood their language.[20]

Ubaque's 1563 ceremony was an immersive aesthetic experience. It appealed to all the senses: dancers were dressed as bears, jaguars, and pumas; musicians played flutes and drums; singers chanted, howled, and cried; artists engaged in body painting; incenses burned; and guests ate at banquets a variety of foods, with maize beer and coca. In the procession along the main highway, crews were organized according to kinship and carried banners identifying their communities. At some points, specialists predicted the weather in order to foresee any possible challenges ahead in the agricultural season. Other sages, masters of the word, narrated tales of past deeds of great lords. Others worked, planting fields and building new structures. Such an event was accomplished through the investment of collective labor and was an expression of the rich material cultures of the highlands. The host, Ubaque, had to prepare featherworks, clothing, and musical instruments, cook food and make maize beer, and organize accommodations for thousands of guests coming from distant lands. Some buildings were specially designed for the ceremony. The feathers, shells, textiles, coca, and many other products were brought to the highlands through extended Indigenous trade networks.[21] Ceremonies like this, with their rich symbols and meanings, were crucial to the functioning of the politics and economics of *cacicazgos* and to the working of encomiendas, because the latter operated based on precolonial groupings and economic systems. In this sense, Ubaque's 1563 ceremony was a political festivity.

Even if Ubaque's ceremony took place more than twenty-five years after the Spanish invasion of this region, it built on an established political culture that had guided the legitimacy and reputation of *psihipquas*—the leaders of the Muisca communities—for generations. When *psihipquas* gathered their communities to feast, they displayed their wealth and power using available cultural repertoires and reinforced their links to their communities. *Psihipquas* had an infrastructure to produce food and drinks, and to receive guests. High-status guests brought gifts, mostly textiles, while commoners worked the fields of the *psihipquas* and provided other services. In exchange, the cacique provided meals and drinks to everyone and gave prestigious gifts like painted textiles to Native nobles who came as guests. The *biohote* set in motion an economy of gifts and counter-gifts in which seemingly voluntary acts of exchange were actually tying political communities together in bonds of deference. While

[20] Londoño and Casilimas.

[21] Langebaek.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

participation in the *biohote* may have appeared voluntary, it was actually mandatory: people who failed to play their roles in the ceremonies and fulfill their obligations to the ruler would be subject to penalties. For this reason, *psihipquas* earned a reputation in sixteenth-century sources as cruel but generous, similar to some Indigenous authorities in Peru in the sixteenth century.[22] In this sense, the *biohote* was a crucial ceremony that established what was expected of a leader. It dictated how to be a good *psihipqua* and how to gain prestige and reputation in the eyes of your kin. *Psihipquas* who successfully hosted *biohotes* had many followers, abundant planted fields, and thriving economies.

Friars and Crown officials condemned this form of ritual politics and aimed to reshape Indigenous lifestyles completely. Some years before Ubaque's ceremony, in 1559, Tomás López Medel—a royal tribunal magistrate—had ordered the construction of special villages for *indios*, where they could live in landscapes organized around Christian symbols. They called this process of confining Indigenous peoples in grid-like villages *reducir* (to order), and the villages themselves they called *reducciones*. For imperial officers, Christian villages provided the only possible order for society.[23] In these villages, friars were expected to oversee *indios* and make sure they were living according to Christian traditions, even asking them about their dreams and what would happen to their souls in the afterlife. Imperial mandates asked friars to have an intimate knowledge of the community and emphasized educating the youth—and especially the sons of caciques—in literacy, piety, and theology.

In practice, this type of surveillance was difficult to implement. For one thing, the *reducciones* were contested. *Encomenderos* initially delayed their construction, and Indigenous communities expressed their outrage—some fled to the moors, while others set fire to the church.[24] Evangelization also faced logistical issues, like the lack of friars who could teach. There were so few of them that they had to rotate, spending a few months in a village and then moving to the next. In each village, friars would aim to carry out the sacraments: they tried to identify any newborns, teenagers, couples cohabiting, or those who had passed away, in order to perform baptisms, first communions, marriages, and funerals. In 1563 in Ubaque, there was one priest, Dominican friar Francisco Lorenzo, rotating among the ten Indigenous villages of the valley. It was only in the 1570s, when Archbishop Fray Luis Zapata de Cárdenas ordained more than one hundred creoles and mestizos—against fierce opposition from many who felt that mestizos were not apt to convey the

[22] Ramírez.

[23] Herrera Angel; Rappaport and Cummins.

[24] AGN / B, Caciques e Indios, 67, d. 28, fol. 904r.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

word of God because of their Indigenous heritage—that there was a more robust number of clergy for Indigenous villages.[25] But even in the 1590s, friars in the valley still had to rotate among three or four villages.[26]

This kind of cyclical evangelization took a confrontational attitude toward Indigenous ritual. In the first catechism for the evangelization of the Indigenous peoples of the New Kingdom of Granada, Fray Luis Zapata de Cárdenas wrote that "bodily order" ("policía corporal") was the "first step for spirituality" and quoted the Scriptures, saying, "I have placed you over peoples and kingdoms, to tear and destroy, to ruin and overthrow, and to build and plant."[27] He meant that planting a Christian landscape entailed first destroying sacred Indigenous cultures—which he termed "idolatries"—in a way that erased them from memory. Friars claimed that *indios* had been deceived and tricked by the devil so they could not see the truth, meaning the Christian doctrine. This was not only a rhetorical device. In the early modern period, the devil was understood as a real physical force: a master of deceit who could take multiple forms and alter reality.[28] The friars often described the *borrachera* as the devil's trickery and as plagued by all kinds of sins. At some point in the translation of *biohote* to *borrachera*, the ceremony became a reprehensible act. The term *biohote* joined other sacred Indigenous terms that the Spanish translated into a diabolical language—including the translation of the term *devil* itself, possibly associated to a sacred, transformative Indigenous figure.[29] By associating these sacred Indigenous concepts with the lexicon of the devil, friars and administrators conveyed as clearly as possible that Indigenous beliefs and ritual needed to be destroyed.

If friars created an opposition between God and the devil, Christian devotion and idolatry, truth and falsity, some Indigenous authorities during the 1560s also proposed a true/false dichotomy in relation to Christianity. This opposition was evident in a series of criminal investigations launched by colonial authorities against Indigenous leaders suspected of keeping to Muisca beliefs and ritual practice in Fontibón, Ubaque, Susa, Tuna, and other Indigenous villages. Alonso, an *indio ladino*—an Indigenous man who spoke Spanish—said that Indigenous authorities asked commoners to "not believe parish priests since everything they say is a lie, and what they [Indigenous leaders] say is the truth and that they should look at their ancestors and make many great sacrifices and offer sacred objects, as their ancestors, and that if they

[25] Cobo Betancourt, 2012.

[26] AGN / B, Visitas Cundinamarca, 8, fols. 378^{v}–79^{r}.

[27] Cobo Betancourt and Cobo.

[28] MacCormack; Cañizares-Esguerra.

[29] González de Pérez, 41.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

think about it they will realize that many commoners became great and wealthy captains through their sanctuaries."[30] It was a struggle between right and wrong: priests lied; only Indigenous authorities knew the truth and had a path to wealth. Commoners would acquire wealth only if they honored their ancestors with shrines and offerings. Dominguito, another *indio ladino* who served as a translator for priests and officials, seemed frustrated that priests could not even compel caciques and captains to attend Mass, and if they showed up,

> After the priest preaches to them by the translation of this witness what God and Holy Mary are and that those who are good will receive glory and those who are bad will catch fire in hell, many *indios* leave laughing at the priest saying that they do not believe it, because after death they will not burn in hell and the priest lies because their *santeros* and *mohanes* [spiritual guides] say so, and the *santeros* when the *indios* or *indias ladinos* or *chontales* are sick, or when something happens to them, they [the *santeros*] go to them [the *indios* and *indias*] and tell them that they need to create sacred objects and offer them to the devil, and that they will heal and all will turn out as they please, because all their calamities happened because their deity (*santuario*) was infuriated.[31]

The mockery of the Christian notions of heaven and hell was part of a larger question around which practices would allow people to gain wealth, prestige, and satisfaction in life and even in the afterlife. The tensions were so deep that colonial archives hold detailed evidence of how members of some communities tried to avoid being buried in churches or even stole the remains of those who were buried there, in order to honor them according to their own traditions.[32]

A tense fracture between Christianity and Indigenous ritual surfaces in these documents. Authorities like Ubaque in the 1560s could govern their *cacicazgos* by appealing to Indigenous ritual and largely ignoring the mandates of friars and imperial officials, though in doing so they risked prosecution. When members of the royal tribunal heard rumors of Ubaque's ceremony in December 1563, they commissioned an investigation by Melchor Pérez de Arteaga, a magistrate of the royal tribunal, and Francisco de Santiago, the *alcalde mayor* (local justice) of Santa Fe. In the license (the document that launched the investigation), the tribunal president García Valverde mentioned that "*indios*" had committed "grave crimes and abominable excesses" in their "gentile ceremonies," among which he included adulteries, idolatries, and sacrifices, "all of which [go] against nature"—by which he meant that, from the Spanish

[30] Tovar Pinzón, 259.

[31] Tovar Pinzón, 254.

[32] Muñoz-Arbeláez, 2015, 118–32.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

perspective, these ceremonies defied natural law. To them, such a ceremony was a worship of the devil, a practice they hoped to expunge from Indigenous lives. For this reason, Santiago was to "understand, observe, and correct them." They brought a supporting crew, including scribes and interpreters. They cited witnesses, interviewed the attendants, and made inventories. One of the interpreters, Lucas Bejarano—a mestizo son of a conquistador and an Indigenous woman from Peru who had learned the Muisca language and frequently translated for the royal tribunal—was shocked. He estimated there were at least ten thousand people on the highway that led to Ubaque's palisade dancing and "howling like tigers and lions and dressed as them and using their habits with figures in their faces, in such a way that they seemed to be demons." Others believed that the number was closer to five thousand or six thousand but were still dismayed by the scale and intensity of the ceremony.

The delegation discovered that Ubaque's *encomendero*, Juan de Céspedes, not only knew about the ceremony but had supported it. He had written a letter for Ubaque's emissaries so they could travel across the highlands, inviting guests to the ceremony with the message: "Christians, let these *indios* pass, they are messengers." Arteaga, the tribunal magistrate, found Céspedes and his family in Ubaque and reprimanded him, asking why he had allowed thousands of *indios* to gather and celebrate when he should instead have punished them (*castigo ejemplar*). Céspedes tried to defend Ubaque, saying that "just like the Spaniards had their sacred holidays, the *indios* had their own." Unnerved by Arteaga's response, Céspedes mocked the tribunal's crew, saying that their persecution of the Indigenous ceremony looked like the "arrest of Christ." Arteaga responded by saying that Céspedes's arguments sounded like "Lutheran propositions"—meaning that he sounded like a Protestant, a heretic, a serious threat in a time of Counter-Reformation Spain, when the Inquisition was targeting unorthodox propositions that might challenge Catholicism—and that if he did not comply with the tribunal's investigation he would be imprisoned. But Céspedes did not shy away. Instead, he gathered some Indigenous interpreters and asked them to tell all Indigenous people in Ubaque not to comply with the tribunal, and as he left Ubaque he took with him all the food and all the forage for the horses, thus hindering the investigation. Céspedes indeed had a history of conflictive engagements with colonial justice and had defended Ubaque in other times. For instance, in 1558, Ubaque had attacked Fómeque and burned some houses and storage units. As a result, the tribunal ordered his removal from the *cacicazgo*, his exile to the Caribbean coast, and the amputation of his left foot. Céspedes

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

defended Ubaque, saying that he "was in his own law," because he was a *psihipqua* before the conquest and had accepted Spanish rule.[33]

Céspedes's remarks are part of a wider trend of expression of religious tolerance in the Iberian world, which was often reflected in common folks' testimonies to the Inquisition claiming that everyone had a path to salvation according to their own law.[34] But Céspedes's support for Ubaque's ceremony also reveals a structural pattern of Hispanic colonialism, which often created common incentives for *encomenderos* and Indigenous communities.[35] Since *encomenderos* were awarded a tribute in Indigenous goods, they needed the caciques to collect the goods and hand them over. In the case of Ubaque and most Muisca communities, tribute consisted of carefully crafted cotton mantles woven by women and men and sometimes dyed and painted by men. These mantles were significant cultural items for the Muisca; they were not treated like regular commodities or a form of currency but rather reflected a person's standing in society. That tribute was paid in mantles meant that the whole system depended on the cacique's position in the community and maintenance of a reputation that would allow him to amass mantles for tribute payments. Yet the way caciques managed to acquire the textiles was through communal events like the *iebzasqua* or *biohote* that took place in Ubaque. This ceremony was at the heart of the *encomienda* system and the early colonial economy, and it often took place with the support of *encomenderos*. Ubaque's ceremony was an exceptionally majestic example of a type of ceremony that was quite common in sixteenth-century Muisca territories. In this sense, Indigenous ritual was the basis not only for the cacique's power but for the *encomienda* as an institution as well.

This fact suggests answers to questions of why Ubaque hosted this ostentatious, ambitious ceremony in 1563, and why Juan de Céspedes supported it. The legal proceedings offer a few possible explanations, including that Ubaque was elderly and sick and was hosting a funeral prior to his death or that he was invoking a massive, millenarist ritual so that all Indigenous peoples would be afflicted with diarrhea (*cámaras de sangre*) and die, "so they would not serve Christians." While much of this reads as colonial speculation and anxiety, produced in a trial aimed at persecuting Indigenous ritual, it is likely that Ubaque's 1563 ceremony was an effort concerted with his *encomendero* to augment the cacique's influence. The authority of the Cipa, the highest echelon of Muisca power before the Spanish invasion, had been dissolved and fragmented since the early distribution of *encomiendas*. The region's epicenter of

[33] AGN / B, Caciques e Indios, 21, fol. 179r.

[34] Schwartz.

[35] Hamann.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

power, Muyquyta, was now downgraded to the status of a regular *cacicazgo*, and the term *cipa* was reserved for the magistrates of the Audiencia of Santa Fe. It is possible that, in this power vacuum, Ubaque and Céspedes identified new possibilities of expansion and gaining prominence.

Despite the *encomendero* Juan de Céspedes's opposition to the investigation of Ubaque's *biohote*, the tribunal's crew interviewed dozens of witnesses and concluded its inquiry, further revealing the polarizing attitude toward Indigenous ritual. At the end, Francisco de Santiago wrote: "I order you to destroy the *bohios* in such a way that there remains no memory of them." In the months that followed, the cacique, Ubaque, was jailed, and the Indigenous peoples of Ubaque were forced to provide their labor for the construction of the main Church of Santa Fe de Bogotá in an effort to replace Indigenous cultures with Christian symbols and practices. They were sending a message: Ubaque's model of authority, appealing to Indigenous ritual, would not be tolerated.

"IN SPANISH HABIT": DON FRANCISCO'S INDIGENOUS CHRISTIANITY

"For over seven years this witness has seen Don Francisco living in good order [*políticamente*] in Spanish suit and habit." —Joan de Morales, 1583

On 2 January 1583, the new cacique of Ubaque, Don Francisco, petitioned the royal tribunal of Santa Fe to accept his son as the heir to his *cacicazgo*, contrary to the matrilineal system of *cacicazgo* succession. In his petition, Don Francisco built an image of himself as a married man who led a virtuous life according to Christian precepts:

> I am married ... following the order of the holy mother church with Doña Beatriz my wife and from our marriage we have a legitimate son and live in good order as the Spanish [*vivimos políticamente como los españoles*], in their dress and following spiritually and temporally all that the Christians follow, in example to every other *indio* of this land.[36]

Don Francisco presented himself as an *indio* who had adopted Spanish customs. The term he used, *vivimos políticamente*, echoed the term *vida en policía* (life in good order), which alluded to both good government and good manners. He thought of himself as an example for all *indios*, illustrating how Spanish customs should reshape Indigenous lifestyles. To consider whether to grant this petition, the royal tribunal scrutinized Don Francisco's clothing, gestures, and daily

[36] AGI, *Audiencia de Santafé*, 125, no. 10, fol. 1r.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

actions and used their reactions to them to construct an argument regarding how colonialism should change the lives of the *indios*. Spanish settlers presented Don Francisco as an *indio* who followed Spanish customs. The witnesses proved Don Francisco's devotion to Christianity by describing his "legitimate marriage"—meaning he was wedded by a Christian priest—regular attendance to Mass and mastery of the Christian doctrine, and literacy—"he can read and write and . . . is very careful in learning all the sciences that the Spanish nobles know." His body also reflected his Christian identity. Don Francisco "has all of his trappings and suits, dresses, as well as his house and table and treatment as any Spanish gentleman and has arms and horse continuously and has everything that is necessary to serve your majesty."[37] The references to his table and bed implied that he ate and slept as a Spaniard, and the references to his weapons and horse suggested that he was willing to defend the king against any threat. His clothes also revealed his Christian identity: "This witness has seen him dress like a Spaniard with garnished coat bringing his sword . . . and feathers with which he adorns himself and it will be very convenient for the politics and conversion of these *indios* that all the caciques did what Don Francisco cacique does."[38] Witnesses used the term *hábito* (habit) to describe Don Francisco's apparel, saying he was "an *indio* in Spanish habit." The term *hábito* brought together dress and practice to denote and make visible an individual's place in society—like wearing knighthood or religious insignia. Don Francisco's Spanish attire implied that he had adopted a Hispanic perspective and changed his position within the Indigenous community.

Paradoxically, when I have found the expression "in Spanish habit" or "in indio habit" ("en hábito de español" or "hábito de indio") in colonial documents, it has been used to identify people whose dress either did not reflect the person's place in society or openly confuse the issue. In the colonial surveys (*visitas*) of the province of Santa Fe during 1590, the first question asked was "If there are among the *indios* . . . some mestizos young or old that are not identified as mestizos but go around in hábitos and names of *indios*."[39] The styles of dress and name were specific qualities that at the same time signaled and constructed the person's social position. Being "in *hábito* of" implied having a dress or suit that was associated with another social position. Joanne Rappaport has studied mestizo women who passed as *indias*, showing how the term applied to people whose social position was not classifiable in established categories. Rappaport interprets this label as being in an intermediate position between mestiza and *india*, suggesting that the label "in *hábito* of" allowed

[37] AGI, *Audiencia de Santafé*, 125, no. 10, fol. 3r–v.

[38] AGI, *Audiencia de Santafé*, 125, no. 10, fol. 7r.

[39] AGN / B, Visitas Cundinamarca, t. 8. fol. 374r.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

movement between two social categories in formation.[40] A person's being "in *hábito* of" another social position implied passage by that person into a social position other than the legal identity assigned to them by imperial officers—a situation that inverted colonial orders and that imperial officers criminalized.

In Don Francisco's case, however, colonial officers saw his passing as a Spaniard in a positive light. In fact, after proving that Don Francisco was a "good Christian" and "lived in good order," the royal tribunal envisioned his petition as an opportunity to massively convert Indigenous authorities to Christianity. They endorsed the petition and forwarded it to the Council of the Indies, saying that with Don Francisco's example "the other caciques and *indios* will become Christians and will get married like the Spaniards, abandoning their idolatries, and our lord will be served."[41]

In this sense, it is noteworthy that despite his adopting Spanish cultural practices, Don Francisco's condition as an *indio* is always marked as difference. The testimonies indicate that he acted "as if he truly were a Spaniard," saying, "[A]lthough he is an *indio* he is a very educated man and his treatment is as a Spanish Christian with much politics," "He has taught himself to imitate the good customs of Spaniards," and "To be an *indio* he is of very good determination and good friend of Spaniards." The continual use of expressions such as *aunque indio*, *para ser indio*, and *como si fuera español* indicate the complex identity dynamics that emerged with Spanish colonialism. *Indio* was phrased in this context as a liability, as a condition one could not transcend and as antonymous to some of the traits that one noted of Don Francisco, like the fact that he was "very educated," had "good determination," and had "good customs." His mimicry of Spanish customs made Don Francisco an *indio* "in Spanish habit"—a position in between the social categories of *indio* and Spaniard—a hispanicized *indio* who, to paraphrase Homi Bhabha, is emphatically not a Spaniard.[42]

It is unclear why Don Francisco transitioned to a Spanish habit and lifestyle, but he apparently did so from the time of his marriage around 1576, seven years before his petition to the tribunal. Don Francisco's Christianism was not an impersonal process of cultural loss or acculturation but rather a reinvention or "self-fashioning" in the new symbolic languages of colonialism. Joan Morales testified that he met Don Francisco eighteen years before the 1583 petition, around 1565, but it was in 1576 that Don Francisco began behaving like a Spaniard.[43]

[40] Rappaport, 2014.

[41] AGI, *Audiencia de Santafé*, 125, no. 10, fol. 10r.

[42] Bhabha.

[43] AGI, *Audiencia de Santafé*, 125, no. 10, fol. 4r.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

As to the direct reasons for this change, I can only speculate, since I have not found traces of Don Francisco's early years. Was he present at Ubaque's 1563 ceremony? Was he training at the time as the cacique's heir in Ubaque's *quca*? Was he Ubaque's nephew? If he was there for the destruction of Ubaque's edifices and punishment, witnessing this destruction must have been a shocking experience. Ubaque was one of the most powerful Muisca caciques, and his sentencing and loss of reputation were scandalous. The criminalization of Ubaque's authority, his imprisonment, and the forced, unpaid labor to build the main church of Santa Fe probably left a mark on the community and, most of all, on his successor. The colonial harassment of Muisca ritual intensified after the 1563 ceremony and especially in the 1570s, around the time Don Francisco began imitating Spaniards' *hábitos*, when Archbishop Zapata de Cárdenas and the royal tribunal carried out some of the most dramatic campaigns to pillage Indigenous sacred objects.[44] These measures were clearly intended to intimidate caciques and thus dissuade them from engaging in Indigenous rituals. Maybe these displays of colonial violence pushed Don Francisco to make use of the special benefits the monarchy granted to caciques to mark distinction in Christian symbolic languages: wearing Spanish clothing, carrying a sword, and seeking the support of the church and the Spanish administration.

Several witnesses suggest that Don Francisco began to imitate Spaniards following his marriage. His wife, Doña Beatriz, was the daughter of an Indigenous woman and a Spanish settler. Such individuals were usually categorized as mestizos by this point in time and were increasingly discriminated against and associated with pejorative traits.[45] Significantly, Don Francisco refers to Beatriz as the "daughter of a Spaniard," thus avoiding the category of mestizo. Don Francisco and Doña Beatriz were looking for ways to cope with the stigma of their conditions as *indio* and mestizo in colonial society and, as they planned a future, saw promise in the ideal of a Christian family.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the very elements that made Don Francisco an ideal model cacique in Spanish eyes rendered him an unsuccessful leader of a Muisca community. His Christian identity was not only a matter of belief or faith; it also defined how he built his social and economic networks. The testimonies make clear that Don Francisco's identity—as an "*indio* in Spanish habit"—lost him the community's support. A witness put it bluntly: "The *indios* of his *repartimiento* and others are not his friends and complain of seeing him so

[44] Cobo Betancourt, 2024; Cortes Alonso; Londoño.

[45] Rappaport, 2014.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

fond of politics and Christianity."[46] As a good Christian, he was a "great enemy of the *indios*, who he says are idolaters and offer sacred objects." Don Francisco described the Native practices of the *iebzasqua* and the *biohote*—which had been so crucial to the previous cacique's authority—as idolatries and false beliefs, and, as such, he openly reprimanded his community for engaging in these festivities: "The objects and figures of false gods that his ancestors worshiped … Don Francisco has destroyed, broken, and burned." Like colonial officers, Don Francisco used a colonial lexicon to disparage the types of Indigenous rituals that established who was a good *psihipqua*. In so doing, he condemned the cultural practices that had provided the basis of authority for previous caciques like Ubaque.

Don Francisco's attitude toward Muisca cultural practices unavoidably affected his finances. By understanding the *biohote* from the Spanish perspective and failing to participate in it, Don Francisco failed to fulfill the role expected of Muisca leaders and distanced himself from the Native economy. He needed cash to purchase European suits, furniture, and ornaments—expensive items in sixteenth-century New Kingdom of Granada—but did not want to engage in the types of activities that provided funding for *psihipquas*. This explains some of his reappearances in the colonial archive, such as evidence in the merchant Cristóbal Lobato's will indicating that Don Francisco was in debt for the purchase of some yellow silk cloth with golden stripes.[47] In other words, Don Francisco was relying on credit in order to maintain the appearance of Spanish-style clothing, but he could not financially support the necessary expenditures on goods like fancy yellow silk because he had disengaged from the typical forms of revenue enjoyed by a cacique.

Another document makes clear that Don Francisco wanted to sell his predecessor's most valuable lands to the *encomendero*, Lope de Céspedes. This document was part of a lawsuit initiated in 1581 against Don Francisco by lower-level Indigenous authorities—Don Diego Joan Tuichiscaque and the other Indigenous captains of Ubaque—who sought to stop the deal. Implicitly evoking the ritual of the *biohote*, they stressed that "these were the most important lands of the old cacique used to be there and that all the *indios* of the region came to do the plantation of the cacique."[48] Don Francisco's derogatory attitude toward the *biohote* had left those lands uncultivated in recent times, and he expected to make a profit by selling them, which would provide monetary income to buy Spanish suits, horses, arms, and other objects to mark his Christian identity. When royal tribunal delegate Francisco Lopez de Velasco

[46] The term *repartimiento* here is used as a synonym of *encomienda*.

[47] AGN, Miscelánea-testamentarias, t. 16, fol. 387r.

[48] AGN, Resguardos Cundinamarca, t. 3, fol. 856r.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

studied the case, he reversed the sale and argued that these should be considered community lands: "Having been informed that the named Don Francisco cacique has already sold and wanted to sell this [community land] before, he shall be commanded not to sell or inherit this land as it must be left for the *indios*."

Don Francisco's attitude toward Indigenous ritual and his intent to sell communal lands also led to the reconfiguration of community politics. Even though the lands were the cacique's plantations, the lower level of Indigenous leaders—called "captains" by Spaniards—stepped up to visit the royal tribunal and fight for community interests. It was also the captains of Ubaque who showed up at the royal tribunal to lodge a formal complaint against a Spanish settler—a task that was usually left to the cacique.[49] That is, the only two lawsuits initiated by Ubaque's Indigenous peoples between 1580 and 1600 were placed by the captains, not the cacique. This differs strongly from the active litigation developed roughly between 1560 and 1580, which was headed by caciques.[50] The lower levels of Indigenous authority redefined their role in community politics by assuming some of the tasks of the cacique, such as litigating in Hispanic courts.

Don Francisco successfully avoided colonial prosecution and was highly regarded by Spanish settlers and officials, but he failed to gain the support of his community. He aimed to govern by petitioning to the royal tribunal and appealing to colonial grace, not by participating in Indigenous spaces for decision-making. He placed his bets on the Spanish administration's capacity to enforce its rule. The most remarkable proof of this is the 1583 petition in which he asked the royal tribunal to modify Indigenous traditions of power so that his son, not his nephew, could inherit his position as cacique. As a cacique in Spanish habit who had adopted the Christian family framework, he saw Indigenous forms of kin as a hindrance. His son Diego was being trained in a colonial school to become a good Christian. He believed that if, instead of his son, one of his nephews—probably trained in a *quca* to reproduce the political culture of the *biohote*—were chosen to lead the *cacicazgo*, the evangelization efforts would be lost. While the royal tribunal responded favorably to his petition, it was impossible to actually implement it without the community's support. For this reason, Diego was never actually appointed cacique.[51]

[49] AGN, Caciques e indios, t. 64. fol. 173v.

[50] Muñoz-Arbeláez, 2015, 27–68.

[51] AGN / B, Real Audiencia, fol. 822v.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

REINVENTING AUTHORITY

The contrasting image of a cacique who took his name from the landscape and governed by hosting communal celebrations in which people with "masks made of nets and lion faces [danced] crying, howling and moaning like lions and tigers," and that of a cacique who bore a Spanish name and the nobiliary title of don and who attended Mass carrying a sword, on a horse, and in Spanish dress reveals the tensions around Indigenous authority provoked by Spanish colonialism in Ubaque. In this colonial setting, the category of custom created a fiction of a traditional republic governing itself, a traditional republic that would maintain its own forms of authority but would live under the precepts of Catholicism and the sovereignty of the king. This meant that under the *encomienda* system, Indigenous leaders had to continue producing the same goods and keep their status without performing the roles communities expected of them.

By seeking to erase Indigenous ritual but keep custom—which in practice in sixteenth-century New Kingdom of Granada meant social and political organization—imperial authorities also challenged basic assumptions about how things like wealth, status, and even salvation were achieved. In other words, cultural practices like the *iebzasqua* or *biohote* were not superfluous ideas of how the world worked but rather manifested how things were accomplished in society. They informed how a person could be considered virtuous or distinguished, who was wealthy, and how to measure wealth and express authority. So central was ritual to the construction of Indigenous authority that its exclusion by colonial administrators meant that if they abided by colonial demands these administrators could not access any of the cultural tools that conferred on them their authority. This put caciques in sixteenth-century New Kingdom of Granada in a complex, even contradictory position that, depending on their choices, placed them at odds with either their communities or with the Spanish imperial administration.

In Ubaque, the result was a fractured, polarizing atmosphere around Indigenous politics. Indigenous leaders and even *encomenderos* depended on the symbolic language of the *biohote* to gain prestige and amass tribute. This tension bolstered opposition as well as major clashes between Indigenous spiritual leaders and those in charge of evangelization over the meaning of life and salvation, as expressed in Ubaque's model of authority. In contrast, Don Francisco chose to recast himself as a Christian subject in opposition to Indigenous ritual. Like Don Francisco, many other Indigenous authorities took

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Spanish names and forms of dress and entered similar requests to change the legalities of *cacicazgo* inheritance.[52]

The fact that Ubaque's and Don Francisco's approaches to Indigenous authority were so starkly opposed reveals the intensity with which this struggle around customs was felt in this area. In one way, these are two samples of a much broader range of Indigenous responses to colonialism in other parts of the New Kingdom of Granada. The caciques of Cogua and Nemesa, for instance, in 1570 asked the king for permission to be the first Indigenous peoples in line in the Corpus Christi procession—because, as a witness put it, they had "the best customs in the kingdom"—and showed up at the ceremony with a large ornamented crucifix.[53] In the same petition they added a clause requesting that Imperial officers ban outsiders from coming to their lands to cut trees or use their lands. They were instrumentalizing Christian identities to foreground their request for the king's favor, as a form of governance in new times. Another striking case was that of Don Diego de la Torre, the notorious mestizo cacique of Turmequé who appealed simultaneously to Hispanic law and to Indigenous ritual and strongly advocated against colonial violence and the harshness of Fray Luis Zapata de Cárdenas's evangelization practices. In the 1570s and 1580s, Torre visited King Philip II's court twice, unleashing a sweeping transformation of the New Kingdom of Granada's main governing organ, the Audiencia de Santa Fe.[54]

In another way, however, the two cases of Ubaque, while specific in scale and intensity, do point toward a more generalizable trend in the transformation of Indigenous authority in the New Kingdom of Granada. Between the 1560s and the 1580s, the policies of the imperial administration and Zapata de Cárdenas's aggressive approach to evangelization left little room for Indigenous leaders to convey their authority in Christian symbolic languages. The case of Ubaque in the 1560s has resonance with other cases in which Indigenous authorities deemed it viable to frame their authority in opposition to Christianity. That opposition became less available after the 1570s. No record has been found to date in the Muisca territory of another event of the scale of Ubaque's 1563 ceremony, while the presence of caciques who publicly performed Christian identities becomes much more visible in the archival record after 1575.[55]

[52] Deardorff, 2018.

[53] AGI, Santa Fe 8, fols. 156^{r}–73^{v}.

[54] Deardorff, 2023; Rappaport, 2014; Rojas, 1965; and my forthcoming book, *The New Kingdom of Granada: The Making and Unmaking of Spain's Atlantic Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming 2025).

[55] Gamboa Mendoza.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In this sense, the contradiction between Christianity and Indigenous ritual was neither unbridgeable nor atemporal but a historical development of the evangelization process and the consolidation of imperial institutions in the sixteenth-century New Kingdom of Granada, which was felt with intensity in Ubaque. Throughout the global domains of the Spanish empire, imperial officials and vassals grappled in different ways with the question of what local customs were, which ones were "good" and which ones were "bad," and how to establish a new political system that embraced local customs while observing Christian morals.[56] In New Spain, Indigenous intellectuals and friars worked together to articulate remarkable documents, like the Codex Mendoza or the Geographic Relations of the Indies, and to outline precolonial traditions of governance and justice in ways that made them compatible with Christian morals while they also aimed to eradicate polygyny, among other aspects of Indigenous social life seen as incompatible with Christianity.[57] In Peru, viceroy Francisco de Toledo established a system that reproduced key Inca labor institutions, like the *mita*, while condemning the aspects he deemed tyrannical.[58] In the New Kingdom of Granada, the greater rigidity of a monarchical vision of Christian citizenship in the mid-sixteenth century created conditions for an ill-defined, more contentious atmosphere that gave rise to borderline cases, like those of Ubaque, Don Francisco, Cogua and Nemesa, or Don Diego de la Torre.[59]

That polarizing atmosphere was not atemporal. Historian Juan Cobo convincingly argues that later, in the last decade of the sixteenth century and the early decades of the seventeenth century, the intervention of the Jesuits brought a shift in evangelization techniques that created new possibilities for Indigenous leaders to recreate communal festivities under the symbolic frameworks of Christianity. Indigenous leaders featured prominently in church murals as patrons and hosted community gatherings while displaying Christian devotion in newly established Indigenous confraternities. This new approach to evangelization opened avenues to express authority and prestige and develop new forms of Christianity, as in Mexico and Peru, relieving some of the tensions toward Indigenous ritual.[60]

[56] Graubart.

[57] Yannakakis, 2023, 73–138.

[58] Mumford, 99–118.

[59] Deardorff, 2023.

[60] Cobo Betancourt, 2024; Charles; Hughes.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

While the horizon of possibilities for caciques to appeal exclusively to Indigenous ritual in order to enact their authority was increasingly limited, it was not lost. While reminiscing about his visits to Indigenous communities in 1636, imperial official Juan de Valcárcel posited that the major obstacle to evangelization was the abhorrence commoners felt toward hispanicized caciques who lacked community support and often could not find anyone to work their fields. Valcárcel thought the cause of this was in the vitality of Indigenous culture and its reproduction through the succession of caciques, Muisca language, and, of course, its *borracheras*.[61] In the mid-seventeenth century, the tension between the Christian identity of caciques and an Indigenous political culture grounded in Indigenous ritual remained a problem for imperial administrators.

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[61] Valcárcel and Langebaek.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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