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Indigenous Mine Workers in the Guanajuato-Michoacán Region:
Labor, Migration, and Ethnic Identity in Colonial Mexico, 1550-1800

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in History

by

Fernando Serrano

2017

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Indigenous Mine Workers in the Guanajuato-Michoacán Region:
Labor, Migration, and Ethnic Identity in Colonial Mexico, 1550-1800

by

Fernando Serrano

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Kevin B. Terraciano, Chair

This dissertation examines the participation of indigenous workers in the colonial mining industry of the Guanajuato-Michoacán region and the impact that this industry had on those workers and their communities of origin. In the present-day states of Guanajuato and Michoacán, Mexico, there existed a vibrant and lucrative mining economy throughout the colonial period (1521-1810). Michoacán's mining industry produced a steady supply of copper and silver, and Guanajuato is best known for its extremely wealthy silver mines, especially after the mid-eighteenth century, when it became the world's greatest producer of silver. The region's mining industry created a very competitive labor market in which mine owners used different strategies to recruit and retain a labor force. Although mine owners paid many workers for their labor, the industry also relied on coerced forms of labor, including slavery, *encomienda*, *repartimiento*, and debt peonage.

Many scholars who have studied the economic significance of the mining industry in the region, and its impact on the world economy, have not adequately examined the composition of the labor force. Those who have studied the labor force have focused on particular mining centers, overlooking the regional context within which the mines operated. Miners competed with one another and with other industries for workers. This competition put considerable pressure on the region's indigenous communities to provide the bulk of the labor force. Also, labor demands led many people to migrate, altering the demographic composition of the region. Using a regional history approach and ethnohistorical methodologies, the dissertation examines the nature of the labor institutions that were utilized to recruit workers to the mines, and the impact of the mining industry on indigenous workers and their communities. Ultimately, this dissertation uses a variety of original sources to highlight the important role that indigenous men and women played in the mining industry of Guanajuato, and the persistence of an indigenous identity in this mining town. My findings contribute to the fields of labor history, ethnohistory, and mining history.

The dissertation of Fernando Serrano is approved.

Stephen Andrew Bell

Eric Van Young

Kevin B. Terraciano, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017

A Mariza, por 17 años y muchos más...

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INTRODUCTION

With its many narrow alleyways going in all directions and at times leading to unforeseen dead ends, the downtown area of Guanajuato City looks more like a maze than a city center. This maze-like pattern is the result of population settlements starting in the mid-sixteenth century when silver was discovered in this area. A visitor to the city in the late eighteenth century was amazed at what he found and exclaimed that “the inhabitants knew how to build their houses on the steep sides of the mountains, taking advantage of the available land with the utmost economy, since the small size of the houses, even those of the wealthiest people, the narrowness of the streets, its irregularity, the vaults that was necessary to construct in order to build on top of them, and in this way leave an underground conduit for the stream that in rainy season must be very abundant, manifests just how much the men of this city had to work in order to be able to reside in the midst of these rich caves.”¹ In this way, the people that came to live and work in this city during the colonial period left their mark in the ingenious and unique layout of the city.

The city has grown and expanded but its downtown area has changed little, in part because its layout and architecture are a reminder of the historic colonial period, something which has earned Guanajuato City the title of World Heritage Site and which has made it a favorite tourist destination.² Besides preserving the historic look of the streets and buildings that remind the visitor of its colonial past, the city emphasizes what it considers its colonial heritage by recreating Spanish medieval traditions that are meant to give tourists a semblance of colonial

¹ The description was made by Francisco Antonio Mourelle, a Spanish naval officer, in a document titled *Relación de viaje a Guanajuato en 1790*. David A. Brading, *El ocaso novohispano: testimonios documentales* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Dirección General de Publicaciones del Consejo Nacional Para la Cultura y las Artes, 1996), 32.

² CONACULTA, *Guanajuato, Tras las huellas de los Insurgentes*, http://www.conaculta.gob.mx/turismocultural/destino_mes/guanajuato/guanajuato.html

period life. For example, the now traditional *callejoneadas* (street tours) with the *estudiantinas* (student music groups dressed in European Renaissance-period garments) attempt to reproduce the Spanish medieval tradition of *tunas* and are supposed to give the city a sense of authenticity.³ This “authenticity” is based on the assumption that a colonial past was a Spanish past. However, what has come to be understood as “colonial” and what is reproduced in cities like Guanajuato City is only a part of the story.

The Indigenous presence in Guanajuato has been generally downplayed or, in some cases, even denied. However, Guanajuato’s colonial mining industry, along with the many other economic activities generated in the region, required a big, stable labor force, something which only indigenous communities could provide. Thus, migration to the region became a life-experience for thousands of indigenous men, women, and children who eventually made the city and its surrounding towns, haciendas, and ranchos their homes. Whereas some recent works have addressed this indigenous presence, there is still much left to be done. In particular, we know little about the labor force employed in the mines. In a classic work on this mining town, David Brading described mine workers as a “free, well-paid, geographically mobile labor force which in many areas acted as the virtual partners of the owners.”⁴ He further suggested that the mine workers formed a sort of “labor aristocracy” because of their “freedom, mobility and lavish spending.”⁵ This description has been for a long time a pervasive perspective of colonial-period

³ *Diccionario de la Lengua Española, Edición del Tricentenario*, <http://lema.rae.es/drae/?val=tuna>; *Dirección General de Turismo Municipal de Guanajuato, Callejoneada*, <http://www.guanajuatocapital.mx/?mod=atractivos&do=callejoneadas>; John Muncie, “Guanajuato, Mexico’s Mix of Mines, Mummies, Music,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 28, 2008.

⁴ David Brading, *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico, 1763-1810* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 146.

⁵ Brading, *Miners and Merchants*, 8.

mine workers. Although this description certainly fit many workers, it did not describe them all. More importantly, it tells us very little about the mine workers themselves. There are still many questions to be answered about the workers, their working conditions, and the impact that work in the mines had on them and their communities of origin.

The Leading Producer of Silver in the World

Silver mining during the colonial period in New Spain (from the early sixteenth century to the early nineteenth century) represented one of the most important economic activities for the colony and in the process made many individuals involved in silver mining very wealthy. However, its importance extended well beyond the boundaries of New Spain and, in fact, impacted the world economy in ways that few commodities have done. Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik claim that “the gold and, later, silver that crossed the Atlantic on Spanish galleons vastly increased the medium of exchange and stimulated European commerce” and “they also helped spark a price revolution in Europe that facilitated the accumulation of wealth in the Northern European countries and launched the industrial revolution.” Furthermore, “by the seventeenth century...Mexico’s [silver] peso became the world’s currency, capturing the world’s imagination as it attempted to slake the thirst for silver.”⁶

Thus, as demand for silver increased during the colonial period so did its production. It has been estimated that from the early sixteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century, New Spain produced approximately 50,000 metric tons of silver. This accounted for about half the precious metal production of the Americas and forty percent of the world’s silver

⁶ Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik, *The World That Trade Created: Society, Culture, and the World Economy, 1400-the Present* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1999), 184.

supply in the early modern period.⁷ Ultimately, this translated to about 1.8 billion silver pesos.⁸ This amount of silver must, therefore, have had a serious impact in the world at a time when worldwide trade was expanding at an ever-increasing rate.

For two-hundred years, from 1550 to 1750, Guanajuato was an important producer of silver, but its production was overshadowed in New Spain by Zacatecas—which became the first major producer of silver in the colony—and even more impressively by Potosí, in present-day Bolivia, which became renowned for the wealth it yielded to the Spanish Crown. In fact, Potosí was nicknamed the "jewel of the Crown," giving rise to the expression "vale un Potosí" (as rich as Potosí) and to endless speculation about the immense wealth found in the *cerro rico* (rich hill, the name given to the hill from which most of the silver was extracted in Potosí).⁹ However, this would all change after the mid-eighteenth century when Guanajuato became the leading producer of silver in the world. But, even then, Potosí's fame continued to overshadow that of Guanajuato. In a visit to the Guanajuato mines in 1803, Alexander von Humboldt, after a careful study of the production records, was perplexed by the fact that "the name of Guanajuato is barely known in Europe, even though the wealth of the mines of this district is by far superior to that of the metallurgic production in Potosí."¹⁰ This observation is supported by evidence, which shows that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Humboldt visited the mines, Guanajuato

⁷ Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert and David Schecter, "The Environmental Dynamics of a Colonial Fuel-Rush: Silver Mining and Deforestation in New Spain, 1522 to 1810," *Environmental History* 15 (2010): 95.

⁸ Richard L. Garner, "Long-Term Mining Trends in Spanish America: A Comparative Analysis of Peru and Mexico," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 4 (1988): 918.

⁹ Lewis Hanke, *The Imperial City of Potosí: An Unwritten Chapter in the History of Spanish America* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1956), 1.

¹⁰ Alexander von Humboldt, *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain: With Physical Sections and Maps Founded on Astronomical Observations and Trigonometrical and Barometrical Measurements*, vol. 3 (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 221.

had an annual output of about 5 million pesos and was increasing, while that of Potosí had an annual output of about 3.5 million pesos and was in decline.¹¹

Considering the worldwide impact of increasing silver production, it would be reasonable to expect that silver had a corresponding impact on communities where the mining took place. In New Spain silver extraction affected communities, primarily indigenous communities, by drafting able-bodied men to work in the mines, by demanding agricultural products to provide food for workers and animals, by placing population pressures on previously sparsely populated areas, by extracting other resources—such as timber—to sustain mining operations, and thus by altering the environment of the silver mining regions. The present study focuses on the mining labor force, and its impact on the indigenous communities where the workers lived.

However, understanding the social and economic reality of the Guanajuato mining center requires a broader understanding of its regional context. In the course of the colonial period, Guanajuato became intrinsically connected to central and western Mexico, as it was from these places that most of its eventual population would originate. In particular, Guanajuato was very closely associated with the nearby Tarascan communities in the present-day state of Michoacán. Since the pre-Hispanic period, there existed a deep and consistent interaction of the populations of both areas, with migration waves going in both directions. At the arrival of the Spaniards, some of these processes were accelerated due to the impact of the mining industry and other Spanish enterprises in the region. This movement created social and economic connections between Guanajuato and Michoacán that generated a unique regional dynamic. Besides the economic and demographic links that existed between these two areas, Michoacán's mining industry—although not as famous and impressive as that of Guanajuato—is also important in

¹¹ Brading, *Miners and Merchants*, 261; Garner, "Long-Term Mining Trends," 908.

understanding the region's competition for labor and the ways in which this competition impacted indigenous communities and influenced their responses to it.

Sources and Methodologies

To properly understand the complicated economic, social, demographic, and cultural changes that occurred in the Guanajuato mining center throughout the colonial period, it is important to look beyond the mining center to its surrounding communities, its hinterland, and any other place that was significantly linked to it. Given its size and influence, Guanajuato's mining industry had an important impact in towns and cities throughout the Bajío region all the way to the Province of Michoacán. This led to long-term changes over a very broad geographic area. For that reason, the present study uses a regional history approach.

As described by Eric Van Young, regional history provides a theoretical framework to analyze long-term historical processes over a particular region with definite "geohistorical" or "physiographic" boundaries. According to Van Young, regional history allows us to explore the complicated, reciprocal, often conflictive, relationships between the countryside and a regional capital or major city, something that is overlooked when we only focus on the urban space. Van Young states that a regional study "has much explanatory power, combining the depth of the microhistorical approach with the breath of a structural analysis over time." Also, he emphasizes the significant role that a city or administrative center plays in a regional system, sitting "like spiders at the center of administrative, political, and commercial networks."¹² Thus, using a regional history approach will allow us to situate Guanajuato at the center of its regional system,

¹² Eric Van Young, *Hacienda and Market in Eighteenth-Century Mexico: The Rural Economy of the Guadalajara Region, 1675-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 3-5.

to understand the development of its mining industry, and to study its impact on the people of the Bajío and the Province of Michoacán, or what I call the Guanajuato-Michoacán region.

A study of Guanajuato's indigenous mine workers presents specific challenges to the historian. Since pre-Hispanic times the region has been a frontier with a highly mobile and diverse Chichimeca population. Given its demographic characteristics, the region's population has been difficult to study and few scholars have attempted to do so. Thus, what we know so far about these Chichimeca groups are generalizations based on colonial-period reports and second-hand accounts. Their participation in the silver mining industry is as yet unknown. More familiar, but still understudied, are the indigenous mine workers from central and western Mexico. As John Chance observed in his study on Oaxaca, and Dana Velasco Murillo confirmed in her more recent study on Zacatecas, documenting the history of indigenous migrant groups in an urban setting can be especially difficult. The concentration of Spanish economic and political control in urban spaces appears to overshadow the indigenous presence, especially as Spanish authority was consolidated over time.¹³ Political and legal attacks on expressions of indigenous ethnicity in the nineteenth century, and the promotion of *mestizaje* as a national ideology in the twentieth century further obscured the indigenous presence in society.¹⁴

One first step to understanding the regional dynamic in Michoacán and Guanajuato during the colonial period is to understand the labor demands of their mining centers and the

¹³ John K. Chance, *Race and Class in Colonial Oaxaca* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978), 5-6; Dana Velasco Murillo, "Urban Indians in a Silver City: Zacatecas, Mexico, 1546-1810" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2009), 3; Carlos Paredes Martínez, *El hospitalito de Irapuato. La cofradía de tarascos de Nuestra Señora de la Misericordia. Documentos para su historia* (Irapuato: Archivo Histórico Municipal de Irapuato, 2009), 18.

¹⁴ *Mestizaje* is the process by which the population became increasingly of mixed Spanish and indigenous ancestry. However, as will be discussed in chapter 5, the concept of *mestizaje* itself is very problematic and has often been used in equivocal ways. *Mestizo* is a term that is generally understood as a person of mixed Spanish and indigenous ancestry, but was often used generically to refer to people of any type of mixed ancestry or even acculturated indigenous people.

migration that this demand generated. Indigenous workers were recruited to work in the mines using different labor institutions—including *encomienda*, *repartimiento*, and debt peonage.¹⁵ These institutions affected indigenous workers in different ways and elicited different responses. Scholars such as Silvio Zavala, Luis Chávez Orozco, Enrique Florescano, and Cuauhtémoc Velasco, have shown the evolution of these institutions and their significance for New Spain's colonial society and economy. Following in their footsteps, my goal will be to document the evolution of the labor institutions utilized in the Guanajuato-Michoacán region to recruit workers to the mines and their competition with other economic enterprises in the region—including Spanish colonists, local Spanish authorities, indigenous elites, town governments, and the viceregal government. Understanding these labor institutions will allow us to discern the ways in which they contributed to creating migration pressures within indigenous communities in the short and long terms.

Learning about labor institutions in the Guanajuato-Michoacán region is only part of the story. Another important part of the story is to understand how the impact from these labor institutions affected indigenous communities' social, cultural, and political realities. Robert Haskett's work on the Taxco mines has shown the ways in which judicial records can be utilized to study how migration to the mines impacted indigenous communities and how those communities responded to this process. Likewise, Doris Ladd utilized documents from criminal proceedings involving mine workers who participated in the uprisings of Real del Monte from 1766 to 1775, which revealed the active participation of nearby communities that supported the

¹⁵ *Encomienda* was a grant of labor and tribute from Indigenous communities to the person receiving the encomienda, usually a Spaniard. *Repartimiento*, in this context, was a forced labor draft used to recruit workers from indigenous communities on a rotational turn of service, also known as *sistema de tandas*. Not to be confused with *repartimiento de bienes*, which was a forced distribution of goods on credit to indigenous communities, often on unfavorable terms.

workers in their struggle. Enrique Tandeter's quantitative approach is also very useful. In his work on Potosí, Tandeter utilized official reports and mine records to determine the economic impact that sending workers to the mines had on indigenous communities. Finally, Celia Islas Jiménez's work on Tlalpujahua relied on information from judicial proceedings involving land disputes and complaints by indigenous communities over labor drafts to provide an assessment of the mining center's impact, or "waves of influence," on the region. In this dissertation, I will utilize a combination of the approaches used by Haskett, Ladd, Tandeter, and Islas to explore the social, political, and economic impact of the mining regional complex of the Guanajuato-Michoacán region on indigenous communities.

Given the diversity of its indigenous population and changing sociopolitical circumstances throughout the colonial period, unearthing an indigenous presence in the Guanajuato mining center will require different approaches. Velasco Murillo's recent work on Zacatecas has shown how Spanish institutions adopted by indigenous groups can be studied to provide important information about those groups' social, political, and economic lives. Spanish and indigenous *cabildos* (town councils) kept records of administrative functions which show indigenous participation in local governance. *Cofradías* (religious confraternities) were more than just religious institutions; in many places they also played a significant social and economic role, especially among indigenous groups who adapted this institution to serve their own needs. Particularly significant for the present study will be the well-known colonial *hospitales*.¹⁶ As Carlos Paredes Martínez has shown, these institutions were very important in Michoacán and Guanajuato, where they fulfilled a wide range of social, political, religious, and economic roles,

¹⁶ *Hospitales* were colonial period institutions designed to provide general forms of assistance to members of a particular community, including, but not limited to, healthcare.

especially for migrant workers. So far, little is known about these institutions in Guanajuato, although their presence starting in the mid-sixteenth century is well documented. Recent works, such as that by Paredes Martínez on Irapuato's Tarascan hospital, have shown the wealth of information that such institutions can provide for the study of indigenous migrant populations.

Any study dealing with Guanajuato's population must confront the issue of ethnic identity and, in particular, the concept of *mestizaje*. It has been claimed that by the end of the colonial period the majority of Guanajuato's mine workers, and its population overall, were predominantly *mestizos*. This assertion has been accepted by most scholars, but it is still not clear whether it was true. In a recent work, Eric Van Young considered the same question for insurgents during the Mexican war for independence. Based on criminal records produced during the war and using a quantitative approach that provided statistical data, he was able to show convincingly that most insurgents identified themselves as indigenous, contrary to the dominant view which suggested a predominant *mestizo* participation. Furthermore, Van Young's approach allowed him to access personal data on individuals that would otherwise go unnoticed. Kevin Terraciano proposed another approach to recover evidence of ethnic identity. In his work on colonial Oaxaca, he utilized native- and Spanish-language documents to compare how indigenous groups viewed themselves in relation to others, and the ways in which Spanish officials understood these identities. Using this language-based approach, Terraciano was able to show the contrasting attitudes that indigenous people and Spaniards had of ethnic/racial categories. Particularly useful for Terraciano were native-language sources that allowed him to access an indigenous view, which was usually absent from Spanish-language sources. Cynthia Radding's study of ethnicity represents a third approach. She subjected Spanish documents to a "creative interpretation of language," which can provide evidence of ethnogenesis (birth or

rebirth of ethnic identities), so important in places where different indigenous groups came into significant contact.

Relevant Literature

There are four bodies of literature that primarily inform this dissertation. First, works on Mexican rural history provide the regional context within which the mining industry operated. Second, studies on labor institutions provide a broader context to understand how specific forms of labor for the mines evolved throughout the colonial period. Third, an analysis of studies on the colonial mining industries of New Spain and the Andes provides a comparative perspective on the nature of the historiographical traditions in both regions. Finally, studies of indigenous groups shed light on the nature of indigenous communities and their social, political, and economic adaptations in response to the pressures imposed on them by the Spanish colonial system, especially the mining industry.

Mexican Rural History

Given its concern for the Mexican countryside, where most of the population lived until quite recently, Mexican rural history has been fundamental in exploring the organization of space and, in doing so, has also shed some light on labor and ethnic relations. In particular, this body of literature has considered the nature of land-ownership in the countryside and its impact on social and economic relations between different sectors of society. Political and historical circumstances in Mexico in the first half of the twentieth century have clearly directed the attention of historians to the large rural landed estate, the *hacienda*. Although the present study does not focus specifically on haciendas, it does consider the dynamic context in which

indigenous mine workers lived and worked, and how different economic activities affected them individually and as a community. The hacienda and other landed estates were important components of this dynamic context; studies of these entities have broadened our understanding of how space was organized and transformed in the Mexican countryside during the colonial period.

Andrés Molina Enríquez, a prominent nineteenth-century Mexican intellectual, has had a significant impact on the direction and focus of scholarship on the hacienda. Molina Enríquez considered the role played by the hacienda in the Mexican countryside and concluded that it was a problem that needed to be resolved in order for the country to move forward. He argued that haciendas were big, unproductive, feudal institutions that hampered Mexico's development. He suggested that these big landed estates should be broken down and the land given to mestizo producers who had proven that smaller landed properties, called *ranchos* or *rancherías*, could produce agricultural products more efficiently and could satisfy Mexico's demand for foodstuffs more adequately.

Starting in the mid-twentieth century, scholars resumed a focus on the big landed estate, considering whether this institution was really as backward and feudal as Molina Enríquez and others had proposed. François Chevalier supported Molina Enríquez's position that the hacienda was an unproductive and feudal institution. He attributed a backward mentality to hacienda owners, who were more concerned with prestige and power than with profit, contrary to "bourgeois capitalists" in different parts of Europe. In the 1970s the Mexican countryside was revisited by scholars who questioned some of the conclusions offered by Molina Enríquez, Chevalier, and others. David Brading was among the first to take on this task, wondering whether it was possible for all haciendas to retreat into self-sufficiency and isolation. He

concluded that although some haciendas might have achieved a level of self-sufficiency, haciendas that produced goods such as cereal and sugar were governed by market demand. Thus, Brading, considering the role played by merchants and miners in the rural economy that surrounded them, looked at the broader context in which the big landed estate operated.

Another influential study, especially important for the dissertation because of its focus on Michoacán, is Claude Morin's work, which addressed the old question of whether Latin American societies were capitalistic or feudalistic, basing his research on the Michoacán Diocese. Morin utilized demographic and economic data, mainly from the area of the present-day states of Michoacán and Guanajuato, to elucidate the type of economic system that existed during the eighteenth century, concluding that, despite appearances to the contrary, the colonial system was not capitalistic. He argued that economic growth in New Spain was due primarily to natural demographic growth and a "superexploitation" of workers made possible by colonial legislation rather than improved technologies or a changing organization of labor.

Eric Van Young's work on the hacienda in the Guadalajara region constituted a major departure from earlier works on the subject. Utilizing a quantitative approach, Van Young was able to provide more concrete evidence on the hacienda. He showed that, generally speaking, hacienda ownership was quite unstable, changing hands as often as once every twenty-five years, thus debunking the claim that several generations of landed families lived leisurely, comfortable lifestyles. Furthermore, Van Young developed a framework for what he called "regional history" and explained how it can be applied to the Mexican social and economic landscape. The present study will be based, in great part, on the definition of a region developed and utilized by Van Young in his study of the Guadalajara region.

Labor Institutions

Studies of labor institutions provide an important framework for this dissertation. Early in the twentieth century, Lesley B. Simpson addressed two important labor institutions in Spanish America: the *encomienda* and the *repartimiento*. Simpson explored controversies over the *encomienda* in the early sixteenth century and how these struggles led to an eventual accommodation between the Crown and Spanish colonists to establish the acceptable uses of the *encomienda*, both as a source of labor and tribute. In his work on the *repartimiento*, Simpson argued that the need for workers in several different industries made the *repartimiento* labor draft a necessity in the early colonial period, since an insufficient number of indigenous men would work for wages. But as time went on and indigenous workers adapted to wage labor, this institution became less vital and even unnecessary in some areas. Simpson's works provide a starting point for contested interpretations of the role played by these institutions.

The extensive compilations of primary source materials, along with interpretations and analyses provided by Luis Chávez Orozco and Silvio Zavala will be particularly important for this dissertation. Chávez Orozco was interested in documenting the economic realities of workers during and after the colonial period, including their working conditions and forms of remuneration for the work they provided. Zavala's studies addressed the freedom of movement of indigenous people during the colonial period and considered how different labor institutions hindered that movement. In particular, his works attempted to answer the question of how workers in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Mexico ended up as peons in haciendas with limited mobility.

More recently, in a multi-authored book, Enrique Florescano, Cuauhtémoc Velasco and others provided a broad analysis of the development of the working class in Mexico from the

beginning of the colonial period until the mid-nineteenth century, including the development of labor institutions from repartimiento and free wage labor to debt peonage. Just as significant, this study included information on wages and standards of living for workers in different sectors of the economy—agriculture, the textile industry, and the mining sector—which allows for a comparative analysis of the working and living conditions of mine workers in relation to other workers in colonial Mexico.

Colonial Mining Industry

Scholarship on the mining industry during the colonial period focuses on two distinct geographic regions: New Spain and the Andes. Although part of the same Spanish colonial administration and subject to similar laws, studies of the two regions tend to focus on different aspects of the industry. Scholars of New Spain have emphasized the “structures” of silver mining (that is, the economic structures), whereas studies of Peru have focused more on the workers and labor institutions. Richard L. Garner, Bernd Hausberger, and Isabel M. Povea Moreno have provided useful comparative analyses between the two viceroyalties. Garner considered the long-term silver production trends in New Spain and the Andes, Hausberger looked at the link that was created between mining towns and indigenous communities, and Povea Moreno focused her attention on the use of forced labor systems in both viceroyalties, in particular the repartimiento labor draft and the *mita* (as the rotational labor draft was called in the Andes).

Robert C. West, Peter J. Bakewell, and David A. Brading have written three important early works on New Spain’s silver mining industry, focusing on Parral, Zacatecas and Guanajuato, respectively. All three works were institutional histories concerned with the structures of the silver mining industry, but in doing so they also dealt with workers and labor

institutions. West emphasized the use of free wage labor rather than forced labor institutions, given the characteristics of the Parral mining region. Bakewell's work was more focused, considering the development of Zacatecas from a small frontier settlement into a prosperous mining center. He examined the development of the city and governmental structures required to sustain the mines. Brading's work was a broader analysis of New Spain's "revolution in government" (the Bourbon Reforms) that occurred in the second half of the eighteenth century. He considered the role played by miners and the mining industry in the social and economic life of the colony. All three works dealt in one way or another with workers and provided a broad interpretative framework and background information that have informed subsequent studies on the mining industry in New Spain, including this dissertation.

More recent studies have focused on the workers and their working conditions. Doris M. Ladd's work on Real del Monte and Robert S. Haskett's study on Taxco addressed the collective responses by mine workers and indigenous communities to abuses by colonial authorities and the imposition of the repartimiento system. Margarita Villalba Bustamante considered the local and regional migrations that took place at the end of the colonial period due to labor demands created by the Valenciana mine in Guanajuato. Dana Velasco Murillo's work examined the indigenous communities in Zacatecas and analyzed their (often ignored) presence in the city. Velasco Murillo was primarily interested in documenting the persistence of indigenous culture in a city reputed to be predominantly Spanish. She concluded that, despite the changes in and around the city, indigenous ethnic identity was maintained throughout the colonial period by a significant number of indigenous people living inside and around the city. Similarly, Laurent Corbeil analyzed the presence of indigenous groups in the mining town of San

Luis Potosí and their changing indigenous identities in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

Michoacán's mining industry has not received as much attention as that of Guanajuato or other major mining centers, like Zacatecas and San Luis Potosí, but it was nonetheless an important industry. I will argue in this work that Guanajuato and Michoacán constituted a region in part because of the proximity of the Guanajuato mining center and those of Michoacán, but also because of their competition over the same labor force. Two recent works that have addressed the interconnectedness between Guanajuato's mining industry and Michoacán's population are those of María Concepción Gavira Márquez and Felipe Castro Gutierrez. Both authors established the presence and persistence of repartimiento labor from Michoacán to the Guanajuato mines and explored reactions by indigenous communities, mine owners, and colonial authorities. Celia Islas Jiménez, Elinore M. Barrett, María Concepción Gavira Márquez, and José Alfredo Uribe Salas have studied the often-ignored mining industry of Michoacán. Celia Islas Jiménez's work on Tlalpujahuá analyzed the social and demographic impact of the mining industry on the local populations around the mining centers, highlighting the significance of population movements as a response to labor demands in what she termed Tlalpujahuá's "zone of influence." Barret, Gavira Márquez, and José Alfredo Uribe Salas have looked at Michoacán's smaller mining centers, especially its copper mining industry in Inguarán and the nearby refining center of Santa Clara del Cobre. This dissertation will build upon these authors' contributions and will attempt to provide a broader analysis of the regional impact of Guanajuato's mining industry and its relationship to that of Michoacán.

The Andes was an important mining region throughout the colonial period, especially during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the silver mines at Potosí became renowned

for the wealth they produced. Much of the historiography has focused on Potosí, although other mining centers have also been examined. One topic that has received much attention in the historiography of the Potosí mining center has been the types of labor institutions utilized to recruit workers for the mines, in particular the *mita*.

There are three historians who in the 1980s and 1990s made significant contributions to the history of Potosí: Peter J. Bakewell, Enrique Tandeter, and Jeffrey A. Cole. These three scholars all focused on the question of labor for the mines, although from different perspectives. Bakewell argued that free wage labor played a more significant role in Potosí than previously believed. The dominant narrative in Potosí had suggested that most workers to the mines had been *mitayos* (*mita* workers). Bakewell was able to show that things were more complicated and that independent indigenous workers, called *yanaconas*, played a significant role from the very beginning, as well. Tandeter's work provided a comprehensive analysis of the economic repercussions associated with the *mita*. He convincingly demonstrated that this system of forced labor was not only a form of exploitation of individual indigenous workers, but also the community to which the worker belonged since it served as a type of subsidy for miners and a form of taxation on indigenous communities. Cole focused especially on the use of the *mita* system as a means of social and political control. He argued that the *mita* was not only a subsidy for mine owners, as Tandeter had demonstrated, but also a tool of social control used against both indigenous communities and Spanish colonists alike.

More recently, scholars have begun to ask new questions on the same topics and have provided new interpretations. One of the most recent trends has been to consider Potosí within the broader local context of the Province of Charcas. One recent example is the work by Raquel Gil Montero in which she compared labor systems in Potosí to those of San Antonio del Nuevo

Mundo, a mining center not too far from Potosí. Gil Montero emphasized the ability of indigenous communities and individuals to negotiate within the Spanish colonial system and the significance of economic incentives utilized by miners in this center to lure voluntary migrant workers instead of relying on the despised mita. Other scholars have considered broader implications of the mining industry in the Andes. Nicholas A. Robins' work showed how the environmental devastation brought about by the silver and mercury mining industries in the Andes not only impacted local populations during the colonial period, but also how it continues to affect present-day populations. These works have demonstrated the significance of considering broader issues related to the mining industry, and how these issues are intrinsically interconnected.

Ethnohistory

This dissertation is primarily concerned with indigenous men and women that were directly or indirectly impacted by the Guanajuato mining industry and, therefore, has drawn extensively from the rich ethnohistorical literature from central, southern, and northern Mexico, with particular emphasis on studies of Guanajuato and Michoacán. Given the significance of Mexico City and its dominant language group, the Nahuas, Central Mexico has received the most attention by historians. Charles Gibson was among the first historians to study the colonial history of indigenous groups in great detail. Gibson emphasized the continued significance of indigenous forms of social organization in post-conquest Mexico and the necessary adaptations that indigenous communities made in response to pressures by the dominant Spanish group. Ultimately, Gibson argued that the end result of centuries of Spanish domination in the region

had led to the fragmentation, deterioration, and adaptation and/or assimilation of indigenous polities and individuals in the Valley of Mexico.

Several years later, James Lockhart provided a much-needed reinterpretation of the changes that occurred in central Mexico during the colonial period. In his work, Lockhart utilized Nahuatl-language sources to understand how *altepetl* (indigenous ethnic states) and individuals were affected by the Spanish presence. He considered how the Spaniards' use of indigenous sociopolitical structures led to continuities in indigenous culture, which had previously been seen as evidence of change or even decline. Similarly, for southern Mexico, Kevin Terraciano used native-language documents as well as Spanish sources from the Mixteca region of Oaxaca to document how indigenous individuals and groups responded and adapted to colonial changes, and to analyze evidence of ethnic identity as understood by indigenous communities and Spanish colonists.

Works on the northern provinces of New Spain have also shed light on the impact of the colonial system on indigenous communities and their responses to it. Given the significant differences between the north, central, and southern regions of New Spain, histories of the north differ from those on the center and south. Michael M. Swann, Eugene B. Seigo, and Cynthia Radding have analyzed the significance of migration and its impact on ethnic identity in New Spain's northern provinces. Michael M. Swann documented migration from central to northern Mexico and described a colonial society in constant movement, especially in the northern province of Nueva Vizcaya, where economic and ecological factors created the conditions that attracted free migration to the region. In her work on the *serrano* (upland) people of Sonora, Radding explored the complicated and fluid ethnic identities in this frontier region where

Spanish colonial institutions, such as the mission and the presidio, led processes of ethnogenesis in response to specific historical pressures.

Sego highlighted the significant role played by the Tlaxcalteca in the establishment of several important settlements in New Spain's northern provinces, starting at the end of the sixteenth century, in response to Spanish attempts to populate the region with indigenous allies that could help pacify the area. Sego provided a well-balanced analysis of the factors that helped several of those settlements to maintain, and others to lose, a Tlaxcalteca identity and the complicated interactions between the Tlaxcalteca colonizers and other indigenous groups in the region, which often led to conflict, at times to cooperation, and, eventually, to indigenous "mestizaje." While none of these works deals with the region discussed in this dissertation, they nonetheless provide useful interpretative frameworks because similar historical processes were at work in the Guanajuato-Michoacán region during the colonial period.

The indigenous history of Guanajuato presents special challenges. First, in the years prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, the territory of the present-day state of Guanajuato was inhabited by a diverse number of indigenous groups—collectively known as Chichimecas—loosely associated in broader confederations that by the end of the sixteenth century had collapsed. The remaining communities became fragmented, and scholars have mostly dismissed them as insignificant in their studies of the region. Second, the silver mining industry led scholars to focus on the Spaniards who dominated this enterprise, minimizing or ignoring the indigenous presence. Finally, the emphasis on mestizaje placed by Mexican ideologues before and after the Mexican Revolution has all but erased an indigenous presence in the region.

In a work on the Chichimeca War of the late-sixteenth century, Phillip W. Powell provided one of the most detailed analyses of Spanish incursions into Chichimeca territory in the

late sixteenth century. Powell described the Chichimecas as primitive in culture but skillful in the art of war. Powell highlighted the significance of this war for the development of the institutions that would later become standard in future conquests (presidios, missions, and defensive settlements), as well as the significance of indigenous auxiliaries, as they were the majority of fighting forces and the population of defensive settlements. In particular, he mentioned the important role played by Otomíes and Tarascans, since they had previous knowledge of the region and had been in conflict with the Chichimeca even before the arrival of the Spaniards.

Eric Wolf and, later, John Tutino have considered the Bajío region, from western Guanajuato to central Querétaro, as a distinctive social and cultural complex. Wolf argued that this complex produced a new economy and a new type of men, given its more “open economy” that was unhampered by indigenous communities, in contrast to the central areas of Mexico. Tutino suggested that the region was a dynamic economic region which played a significant role in the development of world capitalism not only by its production of silver but also its adoption of capitalist ways in what was presumed to be a feudal society.

Claude Morin and Carlos Paredes Martínez have examined the interconnectedness of the populations of Guanajuato and Michoacán during the colonial period. Morin addressed the complicated question of the demographic composition of the state of Guanajuato in the colonial period and its historic link to Michoacán. He described migratory patterns that followed a north-south orientation, which provided the demographic foundation of the region. He observed that most hacienda and mine owners in Guanajuato recruited workers, either voluntarily or through the repartimiento labor draft, from Michoacán and especially from the *alcaldía mayor* (administrative district) of Valladolid-Pátzcuaro (also known as the Province of Michoacán). Paredes Martínez's work addressed the significant roles played by *cofradías* and *hospitales* with

migrant Tarascan communities throughout Guanajuato, as they were used to maintain and strengthen social and ethnic solidarity.

Many studies have examined Michoacán's indigenous history. Two early, classic works on Michoacán are those by Delfina López Sarrelangue and J. Benedict Warren. López Sarrelangue used an extensive array of documentary evidence that provided a clear picture of the role played by the Tarascan nobility in establishing the so-called *Pax Hispanica* (Spanish Peace) in the region. Earlier works on Michoacán had emphasized the collapse of the Tarascan nobility on the arrival of the Spaniards and the disappearance of their pre-Hispanic institutions. López Sarrelangue was able to show that a more dynamic process had taken place. Warren's work on the history of the conquest of Michoacán focused on the transitional period, from the arrival of the Spaniards to the region in 1521 to the collapse of the Tarascan state in 1530. Above all, Warren was interested in demonstrating the significant impact that the establishment of the *encomienda* system had in the region. Warren argued that the *encomienda* ultimately explains the fate of the Tarascan ruler, the *Cazonci* (or *Irecha*, ruler) Tzitzincha Tangaxoan, who was executed in 1530, as he interfered with the functioning of this institution by requiring his subjects to provide him and the Tarascan nobility with tribute, which conflicted with the interests of local Spanish colonists. Both of these works are fundamental to understand the participation of the Tarascans in the conquest and colonization of the northern territories in the years following their own capitulation to the Spaniards.

Several excellent studies have addressed the nature of colonial period indigenous institutions in Michoacán. Felipe Castro Gutiérrez provided an analysis of the indigenous institutions that developed during the (often forgotten) middle years of the colonial period, from 1600 to 1740. Castro Gutiérrez described the evolution of several institutions, which proved

quite useful for indigenous polities, but that ultimately led to a break in “community solidarity” caused by the pressures of the Spanish colonial system, and which ultimately led, in the course of the eighteenth century, to a process of irreversible deterioration within Tarascan communities, as evidenced by land loss, internal conflicts, and the ever-growing presence of mestizos in those communities. Juan Carlos Cortés Máximo provided a somewhat different interpretation. Cortés Máximo explored the complicated and at times conflictive relationship between subject towns and head towns in the Province of Michoacán. He explained that by the mid-eighteenth century the number of subject towns demanding to be separated from their head towns had increased dramatically. He observed that these campaigns for independence had been interpreted as a sign of weakening indigenous communities. However, by examining the inner workings of *repúblicas de indios*, Cortés Máximo was able to show that what others interpreted as a process of fragmentation and disintegration could in fact be interpreted as a sign of revitalization, as these conflicts were caused by a significant demographic and economic recovery beginning in the mid-eighteenth century.

Dagmar Bechtloff analyzed the role that *cofradías* played in the social, political, economic, and religious lives of both indigenous peoples and Spaniards in colonial Michoacán. She argued that *cofradías* were institutions that provided sites of interaction between different sectors of society and which, ultimately, led to the creation of an intercultural society in the region. Carlos Paredes Martínez examined the introduction of Spanish colonial institutions—mainly *cabildos*, *gobernalturas* (indigenous governorships), *cajas de comunidad* (community coffers), and *hospitales*—in Michoacán in the sixteenth century. Paredes Martínez emphasized the significance of adaptations made by Tarascan communities to these institutions to explain the success that they enjoyed throughout the colonial period. Also, he suggested possible pre-

Hispanic precedents that might have eased the transition from the old to the new institutions. All these works provide important points of reference for understanding colonial period institutions and the way they impacted indigenous communities in colonial Michoacán and Guanajuato.

Overview of the Chapters

The main objective of this dissertation is to analyze the participation of indigenous workers in the colonial mining industry of the Guanajuato-Michoacán region and the impact that this industry had on them and their communities of origin. Chapter one explores the region's pre-Hispanic and early colonial period history. Chapter two examines the nature of colonial-period labor institutions utilized to recruit workers to the mines and other economic enterprises. Chapter three considers the dramatic changes that occurred during the eventful eighteenth century, in particular with the repartimiento, but also other changes that impacted indigenous communities in the Guanajuato-Michoacán region. Chapter four considers the attempt in the late eighteenth century by the Guanajuato miners to reimpose the repartimiento system in the Province of Michoacán to satisfy their increased labor demands. Finally, chapter five analyzes the ways in which work in the mines and migration within the Guanajuato-Michoacán region impacted ethnic identity and examines the reasons why an indigenous presence in Guanajuato has been generally downplayed in histories of the region.

Chapter one consists of two parts. The first part considers the pre-Hispanic indigenous presence in the present-day states of Guanajuato and Michoacán, highlighting the interconnectedness of the region and the fluid relationships that evolved over hundreds of years of cultural and social interactions. Some scholars, such as Claude Morin, have already pointed out this significant presence, but most works still consider the region as one of contrasts; as a

frontier that separated civilization from barbarism, sedentary from non-sedentary populations, Mesoamericans from Chichimecas. The reality was much more complicated. This was indeed a frontier region but it was a dynamic frontier with cultural influences going both ways. The second part of this chapter focuses on the first few decades after the arrival of the Spaniards to the region, examining how indigenous groups responded to the newcomers. In part, it addresses how long-established relationships between indigenous groups were affected by changing political conditions, and how some pre-Hispanic historical processes were impeded while others were accelerated. One of those processes was what Morin described as a north-south migration pattern, which accelerated the mingling of Mesoamerican and Chichimeca groups after the arrival of the Spaniards but—contrary to what some have suggested—was not a new phenomenon.

Chapter two addresses the labor institutions utilized to recruit workers for the mining industry and other economic enterprises of the region and the competition over control of the labor force between different local actors and the viceregal government. As is well known, *encomiendas* were the first institution to control and exploit labor sources in indigenous communities, and it was not uncommon for *encomenderos* (holder of an *encomienda*) to rent out their workers to other economic enterprises. I consider ways in which the *encomienda* was used in the early colonial history of Michoacán and Guanajuato and how it was eventually replaced by other labor institutions. In tandem with *encomiendas*, the *repartimiento* labor draft evolved during the second half of the sixteenth century and was well established by the beginning of the seventeenth century. By the end of the 1500s, a constant stream of complaints by indigenous communities in Michoacán and southern Guanajuato testify to the increasing pressure by mine-owners for communities to send workers to the mines, in part through the dreaded *tandas* (turns

of service) of the repartimiento labor draft. I will address some of the strategies that indigenous communities adopted to deal with the pressures put on them by the colonial system. Finally, in this chapter I consider the impact of the repartimiento labor draft on patterns of migration from Michoacán to Guanajuato.

Chapter three analyzes the continued use of the repartimiento system in the Guanajuato-Michoacán region at the beginning of the eighteenth century and the insistence of the Guanajuato miners to use this forced labor system. Also, not having access to repartimiento labor, the acute competition for labor in the Guanajuato-Michoacán region led some miners to find alternative ways to retain their workers. One way was to use debt to limit a worker's mobility. In this chapter, I examine struggles between different mining centers in Michoacán to recruit and retain their labor force. The conflictive changes that occurred in the second half of the eighteenth century due to the introduction of the so-called Bourbon Reforms changed dramatically the relationship between indigenous communities and the viceregal government. This conflictive atmosphere led to tensions and social instability that directly impacted the labor market of the Guanajuato-Michoacán region. Finally, I analyze the revival of the mining industry at the end of the colonial period and its implications for the labor force.

Chapter four considers how the repartimiento, an institution in decline, regained importance in the social, economic, and political context created by the Bourbon Reforms after the mid-eighteenth century. The Guanajuato miners attempted to reintroduce the system to satisfy their growing labor demands. The new repartimiento, however, was not well received by indigenous communities, Spanish colonists, and local authorities of Michoacán, who fought against its implementation. The long legal struggle that ensued provides extensive evidence to determine how the repartimiento system had worked for over two-hundred years, how it had

been used by the Guanajuato miners, and how indigenous communities of Michoacán had participated in the system. However, in the end, the attempt by the Guanajuato miners to reintroduce the repartimiento system failed. As opposed to what happened in the Andes at the same time, the widespread resistance faced by the repartimiento system in Michoacán led to the eventual disappearance of this forced labor draft for the Guanajuato mines in the last decades of the eighteenth century.

Chapter five discusses the many factors that have contributed to the perception that there was not a significant indigenous presence in the Guanajuato mining center. In this chapter, I consider some of those factors and the ways in which they have influenced our understanding of the region's past and present population. I first examine some contemporary perceptions of indigeneity and the challenges associated with adopting an indigenous identity. Then, I consider the long debate about the nature of indigenous people and their social and legal status during the colonial period. I then look at the challenges that indigenous groups confronted in spaces considered to be Spanish spaces. In particular, I will focus on an ever-growing power imbalance between indigenous and Spanish institutions in the eighteenth century, which made it possible for the dominant groups—especially *criollos* (Spaniards born in the Americas)—to redefine ethnic categories to fit their own needs and circumvent colonial legislation that protected indigenous interests. In the next part of this chapter I will consider how the adoption of the ideology of mestizaje by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ideologues, and later by the Mexican post-revolutionary state, has further minimized the significance of an indigenous presence in the Guanajuato mining center and its regional context. Finally, I examine the ways in which indigenous settlement patterns help us understand an indigenous presence in Guanajuato.

CHAPTER 1

The Guanajuato-Michoacán Region Pre-Hispanic Period to 1600

Since pre-Hispanic times, the areas occupied by the present-day states of Guanajuato and Michoacán have had a complex relationship in which territorial disputes, warfare, migrations, alliances, trading networks, familial bonds, and cultural influences have all played an important role in creating strong linkages that have persisted in many ways up to the present time. The areas' histories have been shaped by specific forces that have led to very particular characteristics, but their geographic proximity and other shared historical factors led to the creation of what I will argue was a regional system. Guanajuato was inhabited by Chichimeca groups that had confronted Tarascans and Otomíes before the arrival of the Spaniards. When the Spaniards entered and attempted to conquer the region, the Chichimecas resisted. The Spaniards then appealed to their indigenous allies—which included Nahuas, Otomíes, Tarascans, and others—in order to subdue the Chichimecas. This began a long and complicated process of migration from different parts of Mexico to the Bajío region, where different indigenous groups, people of African descent, Spaniards, and others interacted on a regular basis. The greatest contribution to this ethnic mix consisted of indigenous people from central and western Mexico, especially Otomíes and Tarascans.

The Region

As I mentioned before, understanding the participation of indigenous workers in the mining industry requires us to look beyond the mining centers into their regional context. In this dissertation, I use Eric Van Young's definition of a region. Van Young defines a region as

“essentially a spatialization of an economic relationship.”¹ He states that a region could be described as a “geographic space with a boundary to set it off, the boundary determined by the effective reach of some system whose parts interact more with each other than with outside systems” and “the boundary need not be impermeable, nor [...] necessarily congruent with the more familiar and easily identifiable political or administrative divisions, or even with topographical features.” Geographically speaking, the region described here included most of the *alcaldías mayores* and *corregimientos* (administrative districts) in what would become the states of Guanajuato and Michoacán after Independence. During the early colonial period, most of this region was controlled, either directly or indirectly, by the *alcaldía mayor* of Valladolid-Pátzcuaro, generally referred to as the Province of Michoacán. Eventually, most of the area was broken up into a series of *alcaldías mayores* and *corregimientos*.

In the present-day state of Guanajuato, the *alcaldías mayores* of Guanajuato (1559), Celaya (1571), Sichú y Puxingua (1573), León (1579), and San Miguel (1652) were created (see map 1.1).² In the present-day state of Michoacán, the main *alcaldía mayor* was that of Valladolid-Pátzcuaro, which was subdivided into *tenencias*, but there were other *alcaldías mayores* and *corregimientos* in the area as well: Tlazazalca (1560), Charo (1564), Cuitzeo (1591), Tlalpujahuá (1558), Maravatío (1550), Zamora y Xacona (1544), Tinhuindín (1536), Colima (1524), Tancítaro (1531), Motines (1560), Cinagua y la Guacana (1530), Guaymeo y Sirándaro (1566), and Jiquilpan (1650). I call this region the Guanajuato-Michoacán region, as it

¹ Eric Van Young, *Writing Mexican History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 169. However, Van Young also points out that “regions may be based upon any number of criteria, alone or in combination: there are physiographic regions, cultural regions, político-administrative regions, and economic regions.” Van Young, *Hacienda and Market*, 12.

² Peter Gerhard, *A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 346. It is important to point out that the colonial period Province of Michoacán did not correspond to the present-day state of Michoacán, which includes a broader geographic area.

included the very important mining town and *alcaldía mayor* of Guanajuato and the well-known Province of Michoacán, but with the clarification that the region did not coincide with the present-day political boundaries of the states of Michoacán and Guanajuato, whose present dimensions far surpass the regional system described. While it may be argued that the region under consideration in the present study may in fact be better described as two completely separate regions, as most historians have done—one constituting the Bajío region and the other the Province of Michoacán—I will argue that the social, economic, political, cultural and demographic linkages between these two areas justify its study as a single region.



Map 1.1: Alcaldías Mayores and Corregimientos Located in the Area of the Present-Day States of Michoacán and Guanajuato, circa 1750. Map by Mariza Serrano, based on Gerhard, *Guide*, 16 and Alcauter Guzmán, *Régimen*, 182.

In the definition of a region provided by Van Young, a “center of influence” plays an important function as the unifying component.³ Due to the significance of the silver mining industry, Guanajuato became the "center" of different regional systems. For instance, Guanajuato became a primary market for agricultural products of the Bajío region and beyond, creating a market region. However, for the purposes of the dissertation, the “economic relationship” that defines the region is Guanajuato’s silver mining industry, with Guanajuato as the “center” of the regional system. This economic relationship created strong linkages between the Guanajuato mining center and several communities both in Michoacán and Guanajuato that consistently sent workers to the mines through voluntary migrations and forced labor drafts.⁴ Although our main concern here is the labor market, it was inevitable for other forms of relationships—economic and otherwise—to develop. For example, workers going to the mines on rotational turns of service would use the trip as an opportunity to engage in commercial activities with products from their communities since viceregal policy allowed them to do so tax free.⁵ Also, social and familial relationships created deep, long-lasting connections that have not yet been properly studied.

In his study, Van Young depicts the Guadalajara region as a central place circumscribed in a series of concentric circles.⁶ Similarly, the Guanajuato mining center served as a central point of a series of concentric circles, or ovals, starting with nearby refining haciendas, ranchos, and

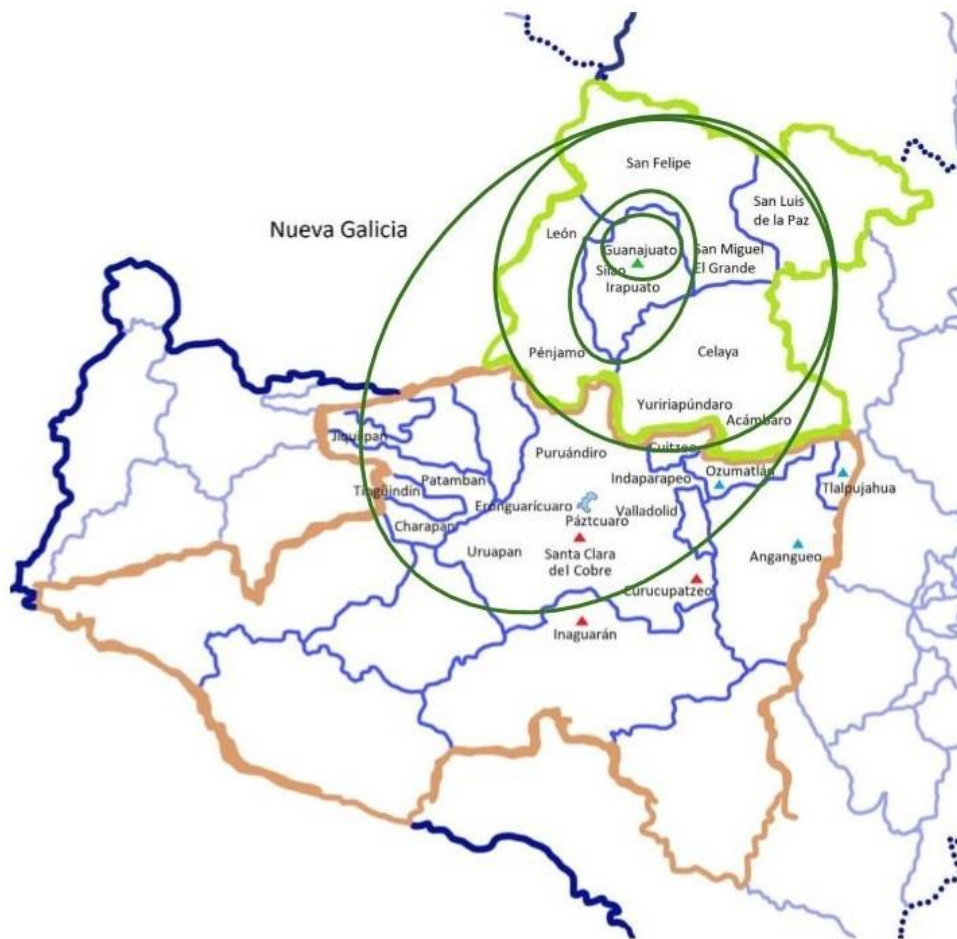
³ Van Young, *Hacienda and Market*, 12.

⁴ Van Young, *Doing Regional History*, 23-25.

⁵ AHMM, 1777, Exhorto, Caja 48, Exp. 15, f. 35-35v.

⁶ Van Young, *Writing Mexican History*, 169.

reales—such as Marfil and Santa Ana—in Guanajuato’s immediate vicinity.⁷ Then, Guanajuato’s *alcaldía mayor*, which included the congregaciones of Irapuato and Silao. The next circle incorporated the adjoining *alcaldías mayores* of San Miguel el Grande, San Luis de la Paz, León, and Celaya, which would form part of the *intendencia* (intendancy) of Guanajuato in 1787 and, later, the present-day state of Guanajuato. Finally, the biggest circle included the *alcaldías mayores* of Valladolid-Pátzcuaro—also known as the Province of Michoacán—, Tingüindín, and Jiquilpan (see map 1.2).



Map 1.2: The Concentric Circles of the Guanajuato-Michoacán Region. Map by Mariza Serrano, based on Gerhard, *Guide*, 16, 344.

⁷ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 231-232.



Map 1.3: Cultural Areas in Pre-Hispanic Mexico: 1. Western Mexico, 2. Mesoamerica Septentrional, 3. Central Mexico, 4. Guerrero. Map by Mariza Serrano, based on Zamora Ayala, "Asentamientos Prehispanicos," 27.

Guanajuato and the Chichimecas

Since pre-Hispanic times and throughout the colonial period, the area of the present-day state of Guanajuato was a fluid and dynamic territory. This territory is located in what has been called *Mesoamerica Septentrional*: an area characterized by great diversity both in terms of the number of different ethnic groups that inhabited the region and their forms of subsistence (see map 1.3).⁸ Mesoamerica Septentrional is also known for its function as a transitional, frontier region between Mesoamerica proper to the south and what has been called the *Gran Chichimeca*⁹

⁸ Verónica Zamora Ayala, "Asentamientos prehispánicos en el estado de Guanajuato," *Acta Universitaria* 14, no. 2 (2004): 27.

⁹ Charles Di Peso, "Casas Grandes and the Gran Chichimeca," *Palacio* 75, no. 4 (1968): 47; R.A. Pailes and Joseph W. Whitecotton, "The Frontiers of Mesoamerica: Northern and Southern," in *The Gran Chichimeca: Essays on the*

to the north, sharing characteristics with both of these cultural regions.¹⁰ The Mesoamerican core is known for its well-established, sedentary, stratified societies¹¹ whereas the Gran Chichimeca has been characterized as a region of nomadic and semi-nomadic indigenous groups with different levels of cultural development.

Most relevant literature on the topic has described the area north of Mesoamerica proper—including Mesoamerica Septentrional—as mostly empty space sparsely inhabited by nomadic and semi-nomadic groups with little or no cultural sophistication. However, recent studies by archeologists and historians have provided a more complex picture. Pailes and Whitecotton argue, for example, that “in truth, there existed a continuous distribution of permanent, agriculturally based villages and towns, trails, and signaling systems throughout western and northwestern Mexico, and it is only the perception of such empty spaces that remains.”¹² Similarly, Phillip Weigand has demonstrated the complexity of the indigenous groups living in the Caxcan area (in present-day Jalisco and Zacatecas) and the way in which this led to the resistance that the Spaniards encountered in their attempts to conquer the area, most notably during the Mixtón War of 1540-1542.¹³

Guanajuato is located in the heart of Mesoamerica Septentrional and its inhabitants at the arrival of the Spaniards—known collectively as Chichimecas—shared hybrid cultural

Archeology and Ethnohistory of Northern Mesoamerica, ed. Jonathan E. Reyman (Brookfield: Averbury, 1995), 13-45.

¹⁰ Zamora Ayala, “Asentamientos prehispánicos,” 27-28.

¹¹ Matthew Restall, Lisa Sousa, and Kevin Terraciano, *Mesoamerican Voices: Native-Language Writings from Colonial Mexico, Oaxaca, Yucatan, and Guatemala* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3-4.

¹² Pailes and Whitecotton, “The Frontiers of Mesoamerica,” 26-27.

¹³ Phillip C. Weigand, “Territory and Resistance in West-Central Mexico, Part 1,” in *From Tribute to Communal Sovereignty: The Tarascan and Caxcan Territories in Transition*, eds. Andrew Roth-Seneff, Robert V. Kemper, and Julie Adkins (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2015), 45.

characteristics and subsistence patterns that resembled the practices of their southern and northern neighbors. The term Chichimeca has been used as a blanket concept that includes all indigenous groups north of Mesoamerica proper. As such, it has led to confusion and distortion in representations of these groups. Some have used it as a generic term denoting “barbarian” or “wild” indigenous peoples thought to be exclusively nomadic or semi-nomadic. Like the term “Otomí”, which had derogatory connotations among the Nahuas and then the Spaniards, a problem that David Wright has called a "black legend," the term "Chichimeca" underwent its own black legend and is still used in derogatory fashion, even by many scholars.¹⁴ Some have gone so far as to interpret the meaning of the term Chichimeca, based on a loose linguistic analysis, as “hijos de perra.”¹⁵ I use the following definition:

The term “Chichimeca” applies to groups with diverse economies and forms of organization: from stratified agricultural societies, to egalitarian groups that lived off hunting and gathering, and communities culturally hybrid. Furthermore, among these groups there could be significant ethnic and linguistic differences. From this, we can conclude that the name Chichimeca did not presuppose technological, economic, ethnic, or linguistic equality, but only a common geographic origin: the inhabitants of the northern region.¹⁶

The area defined as Mesoamerica Septentrional underwent different phases of human occupation in the centuries before the arrival of the Spaniards. One of the earliest recognizable cultural influences in the area was the Chupícuaro tradition, which flourished between 500 BCE and 200 CE in the southeastern part of the present-day state of Guanajuato.¹⁷ The Chupícuaro

¹⁴ David Wright, *La conquista del bajo y los orígenes de San Miguel de Allende* (Mexico City: Editorial de la Universidad del Valle de México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999), 24-25.

¹⁵ Patricia Campos Rodríguez, “Poblamiento y extinción de los pueblos chichimecas,” in *Comunidades indígenas en Guanajuato*, ed. Isaura Rionda Arreguín (Guanajuato: Archivo General del Estado de Guanajuato, 1996), 37.

¹⁶ Zamora, “Asentamientos Prehispánicos,” 38.

¹⁷ Zamora, “Asentamientos Prehispánicos,” 29.

tradition had a wide geographic influence, which included contact with important sites such as the Chalchihuites of Altavista, Zacatecas, as well as links to the cultures of central Mexico in the late formative and terminal periods.¹⁸ The groups that comprised this culture were sedentary agriculturalists settled near rivers and lakes, which they utilized to grow the basic Mesoamerican staples of corn, chili, tomatoes, and squash. These groups lived in well-organized settlements with ceremonial centers and monumental architecture that left important landmarks in places like Chupícuaro, Peralta, and Plazuelas in the state of Guanajuato.¹⁹

The Chupícuaro tradition was followed by a tradition known as El Bajío, which flourished from about 300 to 700 CE. Like the Chupícuaro tradition, El Bajío was characterized by a growing population engaged in agriculture and monumental architecture in a growing number of urban settlements. This tradition mainly encompassed the present-day states of Queretaro and Guanajuato and was characterized by a more independent expression of local societies.²⁰ It was an important corridor that linked central Mexico with western Mexico and beyond through the commercial corridor associated with Teuchitlan. In western Guanajuato, monumental architecture was very similar to the well-known architectonic structures known as *guachimontones* from Teuchitlan, Jalisco, pointing to a close link and cultural interaction between these two regions.²¹

After 800 CE, settlements in the area of the present-day state of Guanajuato went through a phase of retraction. Many sites were abandoned while others significantly diminished in size

¹⁸ Zamora, "Asentamientos Prehispánicos," 28-29.

¹⁹ Zamora, "Asentamientos Prehispánicos," 29.

²⁰ Zamora, "Asentamientos Prehispánicos," 31.

²¹ Zamora, "Asentamientos Prehispánicos," 31-32.

and importance. From 900 to 1200 CE, the Toltec tradition, which had a strong military presence in the region, led to further adaptations by local populations that moved to better protected or more isolated settlements. In the western part of the state, the main occupational centers displayed advanced architectural styles, including retaining walls and ball game courts, while the central and eastern parts were slowly abandoned by the more sedentary populations and, after the twelfth century, occupied mainly by semi-sedentary groups with mixed economies that included hunting and gathering as well as agriculture.²²

After the mid-fourteenth century, the southern region of the state of Guanajuato came under Tarascan control and/or influence while the eastern and western regions were under Nahuatl control and/or influence. Both groups, along with Otomí allies, began a series of incursions into the region with the intent of controlling the Chichimeca groups that had settled there. In the first decades of the sixteenth century there was a retraction from the area by the Tarascans and Nahuatl, which had to confront the impending threat of the Spanish invasion and the advent of epidemic diseases, leaving wide spans of territory open to Chichimeca incursions.²³

Just prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, there were several Chichimeca groups living in the area of the present-day state of Guanajuato. The three major groups were: Guachichiles in the west, Guamares in the center, and Pames in the east. However, there were also smaller groups—such as Copuces, Jonaces, and Guaxabanes—which were culturally and politically related to those three major groups.²⁴ The Pames were located in the eastern side of the state of

²² Zamora, “Asentamientos Prehispánicos,” 35.

²³ Zamora, “Asentamientos Prehispánicos,” 35-37.

²⁴ Wigberto Jiménez Moreno, *La colonización y evangelización de Guanajuato en el siglo XVI* (Mexico City: Editorial Cvltrva, 1944), 126-129; Phillip W. Powell, *Soldiers, Indians and Silver: The Northward Advance of New Spain, 1550-1600* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), 33-34; Zamora, “Asentamientos Prehispánicos,” 37-38.

Guanajuato, had a sedentary and semi-sedentary life-style, and engaged in agriculture. Their settlements in southern Guanajuato included the two important frontier defensive settlements of Acámbaro and Yuririapúndaro, where the Pames are said to have lived with Tarascans and Otomíes.²⁵ Apparently, they were influenced profoundly by Mesoamerican cultural practices. Fray Guillermo de Santa María described them as "the least harmful people of the Chichimecas."²⁶

The Guamares were located in the central part of the state, along the mountain ranges. They had a significant presence in Guanajuato, Silao, Irapuato, Abasolo, and Pénjamo. They are described by Santa María as "the bravest and most bellicose nation, traitorous and harmful, of all the Chichimecas."²⁷ The Guachichiles were said to control the largest territory. However, they only occupied a small section of the western part of Guanajuato, which included the important city of León. Santa María says of them: "it is the most populous group of the Chichimecas and the one that has caused the most damages."²⁸ These were the groups that inhabited the state of

²⁵ Zamora Ayala, "Asentamientos prehispánicos," 37; Guillermo de Santa María, *Guerra de los Chichimecas: México 1575-Zirosto 1580* (Zamora, Mich. and Guanajuato: El Colegio de Michoacán, Universidad de Guanajuato, 1999), 206.

²⁶ Santa María, *Guerra de los Chichimecas*, 206. We must, however, keep in mind that Guillermo de Santa María's purpose with this well-known, and much-cited, work was to justify the war against, and later enslavement of, indigenous groups in the region during the aptly called Guerra de los Chichimecas (literally "War of the Chichimecas," but most often simply translated as Chichimeca War). Thus, his descriptions of these indigenous groups was very superficial and at times clearly biased. For example, he described them as mostly warring nations with little cultural sophistication but it is clear from his own writings that his own knowledge of their cultures was only from indirect information he acquired from informants—many of them enemies of the Chichimecas—and his own experience from the Spanish frontline. Unfortunately, his descriptions have been used once and again by scholars to characterize Chichimeca culture, paying little attention to these possible biases.

²⁷ Santa María, *Guerra de los Chichimecas*, 206.

²⁸ Santa María, *Guerra de los Chichimecas*, 206-207.

Guanajuato just prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, and the peoples who confronted the Spaniards and their indigenous allies as they advanced into their territories.

Michoacán and the Tarascans

Michoacán was clearly located within the borders of the Mesoamerican core and thus shared many characteristics in terms of socio-political organization with other Mesoamerican groups, such as the Nahuas of central Mexico. However, they were also able to develop a very different, and unique, culture. This marked difference can be explained in part by the geographic location of Michoacán, just west of the basin of Mexico and south of the important commercial corridor of the west coast. This location created both a link with these important cultural regions and established a separation that would last from the Formative (1500-300 BCE) all the way to the Postclassic (900-1519 CE) and early Colonial periods (1521-1550).

The state of Michoacán is well-known for the Tarascan Empire, which rivaled that of the so-called Aztec Empire when the Spaniards arrived. Many people in Michoacán, to this day, proudly proclaim that they were never conquered by the Aztecs. However, unlike the highland regions of central and southern Mexican—especially the Basin of Mexico—the central region of Michoacán did not have a history of powerful city-states or empires in the Classic and early Postclassic periods.²⁹ Nonetheless, its position on the crossroads of important civilizational centers in the west and the central valleys during the Formative, Classic, and Postclassic periods had a deep impact on its social and cultural development.

²⁹ Sarah Albiez-Wieck, *Contactos exteriores del estado tarasco: influencias desde dentro y fuera de Mesoamérica*, vol. 1 (Zamora, Mich.: El Colegio de Michoacán, 2013), 59.

During the early Formative period, the most characteristic site in Michoacán was El Opeño in the present-day municipality of Jacona in the northwestern part of the state. This culture shared many characteristics with a contemporary culture of the western Mexican coast, centered in the Colima site of Capacha. These cultures shared funerary traditions thought to be precursors to the well-known “tumbas de tiro” (shaft tombs) found throughout the states of Jalisco, Nayarit, Colima, and Michoacán and along the west coast of central and northern south America.³⁰ However, El Opeño was also associated with the Tlatilco tradition of central Mexico, as it shared ceramic traditions that would later be adopted by the Tarascans.³¹

In the late Formative period, the Chupícuaro tradition of southern Guanajuato had an important influence on the region. Evidence of Chupícuaro's influence can be found in places like El Tepalcate, Chimalhuacán, Tlapacoya, and Cuicuilco in the Valley of Mexico. The Lerma river was a possible link between central Mexico and the west, as the Chupícuaro site was located near this river. In Michoacán, Zinapécuaro was an important center, primarily because of its obsidian. Obsidian from this site can be found in the Valley of Mexico, Oaxaca, San Lorenzo, Veracruz, and the Mayan lowlands. López Mestas suggests that this center could have functioned as a link between the west and other regions of Mesoamerica during this period.³² Furthermore, Braniff argues that the influence of western Mexico on central Mexico in the Formative period was very strong and that, in fact, central Mexico could be considered marginal to the west and east, mainly to the Chupícuaro and Olmec cultures.³³

³⁰ José Arturo Oliveros Morales, *Hacedores de tumbas en El Opeño, Jacona, Michoacán* (Zamora, Mich.: El Colegio de Michoacán, H. Ayuntamiento de Jacona, 2004), 14-15.

³¹ Albiez-Wieck, *Contactos exteriores*, vol. 1, 60.

³² Albiez-Wieck, *Contactos exteriores*, vol. 1, 61.

³³ Albiez-Wieck, *Contactos exteriores*, vol. 1, 61.

Two important influences on Michoacán during the Classic period were the Teuchitlan tradition from Jalisco, which Weigand describes as “the Occidente’s first experiment in a highly complex sociocultural system,”³⁴ and the well-known civilization of Teotihuacán in the Valley of Mexico. While it is unclear how much influence either one of these traditions had on Michoacán, there is much evidence to suggest constant interaction. Some of the most important sites in Michoacán in this period were El Infiernillo, Tingambato, Zinapécuaro, Guadalupe, La Villita, El Otero, Huetamo, Jiquilpan, Tanganhuato, Loma Santa María, and Erongarícuaro.

Two important centers during the Classic period that would have an enduring impact on the region would be Cuitzeo and Zacapu. Around Lake Cuitzeo many important sites have been uncovered.³⁵ One of these sites is Tres Cerritos. Available information indicates that this site was populated since the Formative period and maintained human settlements throughout the pre-Hispanic period. Its first documented population occurred in the Formative period and was associated with the above-mentioned Chupícuaro culture of southern Guanajuato. During the Classic period, some elements from the Chupícuaro culture persisted alongside cultural influences from the great urban center of Teotihuacan.³⁶ Two important products from the Cuitzeo Basin were salt and obsidian, which may explain its links with Teotihuacan.³⁷

³⁴ Weigand, “Territory and Resistance, Part 1” 54.

³⁵ The whole area of the Cuitzeo Lake basin contains hundreds of identified sites, and only a few have been explored so far. Thus, what we know is based on a few archeological projects. Agapi Filini and others have complained of the lack of funding for research in the area, since much of the funding goes to “megaprojects” in central and southern Mexico. In fact, Filini argues that “the archeological patrimony of Cuitzeo has been excluded from the historical construction of the nation and, therefore, has been devalued by the dominant groups.” Agapi Filini, “La cuenca de Cuitzeo, Michoacán: patrimonio arqueológico y ordenamiento territorial,” in *La política de ordenamiento territorial en México: de la teoría a la práctica*, eds. María Teresa Sánchez Salazar, Gerardo Bocco Verdinelli, and José María Cassado Izquierdo (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, IGg, CIGA, SEMARNAT, INECC, 2013), 300.

³⁶ Filini, *La cuenca de Cuitzeo*, 300.

³⁷ Albiez-Wieck, *Contactos exteriores*, vol. 1, 62.

Zacapu was another important area in the Classic period. Extensive marshlands (now dried) dominated the landscape. The site known as Loma Alta, located on a former island in the center of the marshlands, contains several structures, some measuring as much as 200 by 130 feet, with a typical Mesoamerican architectural design. This architectural style prevailed in the state of Guanajuato during the Classic period, but is the first one found in the state of Michoacán.³⁸ Loma Alta has a very unique ceramic and artistic tradition with elaborate designs of animated figures—dancing people, flying birds, jumping and running animals—which can be traced back to the Chupícuaro tradition but reached its apogee in the Loma Alta tradition.³⁹ This tradition came to an end by the end of the sixth century, corresponding in time with the decline of other great centers throughout Mesoamerica, such as Teotihuacan. The ceramic tradition from this center would later reappear in the Tarascan region of the late Postclassic period. Carot argues that this was not a coincidence since some of the people that migrated out of the region in the Classic period would later return and readopt the style as a form of reverence and connection to their ancestors.⁴⁰ In fact, she argues that the “Chichimecas” mentioned in the *Relación de Michoacán*, who would later settle in the Lake Pátzcuaro region and merge with the local populations to become the Tarascan ruling elites, were not “wild” Chichimecas from the north but rather the descendants of those who had previously migrated to the north and had returned to the place of their ancestors.⁴¹

³⁸ Patricia Carot, “La cultura Loma Alta o los orígenes de la cultura purépecha,” *Revista Occidente* (2015): 5.

³⁹ Carot, “La cultura Loma Alta,” 8-9. This design has been often compared to that found in cultures farther to the north, first in the Classic period Chalchihuites tradition and then, even more prominently, in the Hohokam tradition of the American Southwest, where it flourished from the late Classic to the late Postclassic.

⁴⁰ Carot, “La cultura Loma Alta,” 10.

⁴¹ Carot, “La cultura Loma Alta,” 10.

As with the Tres Cerritos site, there is ample evidence of interaction between Loma Alta and the urban center of Teotihuacan. In recent excavations in the residential areas of Teotihuacan, human and material remains have shown the presence of people from western Mexico and, in particular, from Michoacán. Among these findings, there were the characteristic shaft tombs of western Mexico and funerary offerings from the Loma Alta tradition.⁴² Also, human remains have shown that people who lived at least part of their adult lives in the lake Pátzcuaro basin lived in Teotihuacan.⁴³

Both of these important Classic period Michoacán sites—Tres Cerritos and Loma Alta—show an important characteristic of the region: its unique, local characteristics combined with influences from other parts of Mesoamerica, in particular central Mexico. Thus, Michoacán during its Formative and Classic periods showed a great level of integration with the broader Mesoamerican culture region as well as independent developments. This dynamic regional, demographic, cultural exchange would not only continue but intensify in the late Classic and Postclassic periods. There were some important changes that would have a long-lasting impact. First, the fall of the main urban/cultural centers throughout Mesoamerica—Teotihuacan, Teuchitlan, Loma Alta—led to a dispersion of different groups of people to diverse locations. This created (or strengthened) a demographic link between different areas of Mesoamerica, northern Mexico, and even what is now the American southwest.⁴⁴ Secondly, it led to the proliferation of small political entities that replaced the big urban centers that had had a great influence and/or control of big parts of Mesoamerica. Finally, this would eventually lead to

⁴² Carot, “La cultura Loma Alta,” 12.

⁴³ Albiez-Wieck, *Contactos exteriores*, vol. 1, 63.

⁴⁴ This, of course, is a contested assertion.

significant demographic increases that would make the rise of the late Postclassic urban centers possible.⁴⁵

The lineage of the Uacúsecha (eagles) arrived to the Lake Pátzcuaro basin in the early thirteenth century, signaling the beginning of the most formidable political entity in the region. The *Relación de Michoacán* simply claims that they were Chichimeca migrants from the north who settled around Lake Pátzcuaro. It is now believed that they were not in fact nomadic Chichimeca groups, but sedentary groups from the Zacapu region who had migrated north at the end of the Classic period and had returned and settled back in their previous land.⁴⁶ The Uacúsechas soon established working relationships with the local populations, referred to as “isleños” (islanders) in the *Relación de Michoacán*, through marriage alliances. By the mid-fourteenth century, the Uacúsechas and their allies controlled the Lake Pátzcuaro basin and then moved on to conquer surrounding areas. This process led to the consolidation of the Tarascan state. By the mid-fifteenth century, after the death of Tariacuri, considered the founding figure of the Uacúsechas, the territory was ruled from three centers: Pátzcuaro, Ihuatzio, and Tzintzuntzan. Pátzcuaro was ruled by Tariacuri’s son, Hiquingare, Ihuatzio by his grandson, Hiripan, and Tzintzuntzan by his other grandson, Tangaxoan. This organization led to the institutionalization of military conquests and the establishment of a state administration to govern the growing territory.

By the end of the fifteenth century, around 1470, the Tarascan state reached its maximum extent, in direct control of much of the territory of the present-day state of Michoacán, extending from the Lerma river on the north, the Balsas river to the south, and the present-day border

⁴⁵ Albiez-Wieck, *Contactos exteriores*, 65.

⁴⁶ Carot, “La cultura Loma Alta,” 10.

between the states of Michoacán and México to the east.⁴⁷ This expansion led to confrontations with the formidable forces of the Triple Alliance of central Mexico (better known as the Aztec Empire). This struggle continued until the arrival of the Spaniards to the region, when the Tarascans were forced to retreat from previously occupied regions just before the arrival of the Spaniards. This retreat was in response to political, military, and health factors. As the Spaniards advanced from the coast of Veracruz inland to the Valley of Mexico, the Tarascans were forced to consider the implications of the newcomers's arrival. Strange diseases arrived in advance of Spaniards, wreaking havoc on the population. Some time in the late 1520s, the Mexicas sent emissaries to Zuangua, the Tarascan ruler, to request assistance in fighting the Spaniards. However, Zuangua did not accede to their petition and decided to await the Spaniards in Michoacán. Soon after, Zuangua died of smallpox.⁴⁸ Zuangua's death led to political crisis and instability, but eventually Tzintzincha Tangaxoan was named the new ruler, or *cazonci*, and it was he who had to deal with the Spaniards.

The Spanish Conquest of Michoacán

The Spaniards learned about Michoacán and its importance from the Mexicas, who told them about its wealth and power. Thus, after the fall of Tenochtitlan on August 13, 1521, the Spaniards and their indigenous allies, which now included groups from the former Triple Alliance—Mexicas, Tepeacas, Acolhuas, etc.—made their way to the west. Spaniards and representatives of the Tarascan nobility met in that same year and the outcome was a negotiated peace whereby the Spaniards were allowed into Tarascan territory with little or no military

⁴⁷ Albiez-Wieck, *Contactos exteriores*, 69.

⁴⁸ Claudia Espejel Carbajal, *La justicia y el fuego: dos claves para leer la Relación de Michoacán* (Zamora, Mich.: El Colegio de Michoacán, 2008), 153-154.

opposition. Most Spaniards at the time interpreted this as an unconditional surrender and many historians since then have sustained the view that this signaled the collapse of the Tarascan state with all its pre-Hispanic institutions. However, the history of the region is more complicated; many pre-Hispanic Tarascan institutions survived and their story is part of the early colonial history of the region.

The earliest news we have of Michoacán is from the *Cartas de Relación* that Hernan Cortés wrote to the King of Spain describing his campaigns in Mexico. Of course, Cortés in writing his letters to the king had very concrete political objectives, so it is clear that he portrayed the situation in the most positive light possible, as he was trying to obtain certain favors for services rendered to the crown. Cortés narrated the first encounter in the following manner:

As the city of Temixtitan [Tenochtitlan] was so important, and so renowned throughout these parts, it came to the knowledge of the lord of a very great province, seventy leagues distant from Temextitan, called Mechuacan, how we had destroyed and desolated it, and, considering the strength and grandeur of the said city, it seemed to the lord of that province that, inasmuch as it could not defend itself, there was nothing which could resist us. So, from fear or whatever cause he chose, he sent certain messengers, who, through the interpreters of his language, told me on his part, that their lord had learned that we were vassals of a great ruler, and that, with my approval, he and his people desired to become vassals and have friendship with us.⁴⁹

From Cortés' own statements, we can arrive at different interpretations. First, Cortés was careful enough to suggest that the Cazonci's reaction could be based on one or more factors, including fear and perhaps political and even economic considerations. On the other hand, Cortés also described the conclusion of the negotiations between Spaniards and Tarascans in somewhat equivocal terms. If the messengers communicated to him that the Cazonci and his people were

⁴⁹ Hernan Cortés, "Third Letter," in *Fernando Cortes, His Five Letters of Relation to the Emperor Charles V*, trans. Francis Augustus MacNutt, vol. 2 (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1908), 130-131.

interested in becoming vassals of the King of Spain, he also stated that they wanted to establish friendship with the Spaniards. The difference between becoming vassals and establishing a friendship does not seem to suggest an unconditional surrender. Becoming vassals or servants of the king would indicate surrender, but establishing a friendship could be interpreted as the creation of an alliance, which might have been perceived by many within the Tarascan nobility as a desirable outcome. Most likely, Cortés wanted to make a specific claim that the Tarascans had concluded that resistance against the Spaniards was futile, but he did not want to portray the Tarascans as a weak kingdom. He wanted to impress upon the king that he had been able to subdue a mighty kingdom without bloodshed, by the use of his diplomatic skills alone, and that the king could count on a powerful ally in the Tarascans who could help them continue their conquests to the north--a role that the Tarascans did in fact fulfill.

What we can conclude from Cortés' *Cartas de Relación* is that the Spaniards and Tarascans did negotiate something. This first visit by emissaries of the Cazonci to the Spaniards is one of many such visits, which points to diplomatic negotiations rather than unconditional submission. This assertion is attested by the fact that Cortés gave gifts to the Cazonci's emissaries gifts to take back to their ruler. Cortés stated that "After four or five days, I gave them for their chief many such things as they esteemed, and others for themselves, so they departed very happy and satisfied."⁵⁰ This ceremonial act of gift exchange suggests negotiation, not imposition.

In reality, the so-called Conquest of Michoacán began in a rather limited way and there is no indication of a major breakdown of order in that province. Nonetheless, the image presented in the *Relación de Michoacán* is very different. The *Relación de Michoacán* is a somewhat

⁵⁰ Cortés, "Third Letter," 137.

paradoxical work. On the one hand, it is the most often cited reference to suggest the collapse of the Tarascan state at the arrival of the Spaniards, and on the other hand it contains information that supports the opposite conclusion.

It is primarily from the account offered in the *Relación de Michoacán* that many historians have interpreted the initial encounters between Tarascans and Spaniards and the outcome of those encounters as an unconditional surrender by a supposedly weak and fearful ruler who could not manage to organize a concerted attack against the Spaniards. The *Relación* describes how the Cazonci in learning that the Spaniards were coming to his kingdom listened to the advice of some nobles, particularly one called Timas, who suggested that he commit suicide to avoid confronting the Spaniards. Timas said in a recriminating voice “Let’s go, my lord, that we are ready. Were your grandparents and your ancestors someone’s slaves for you to want to become a slave yourself?”⁵¹ Don Pedro is described as the voice of reason and replies “Lord, [the Spaniards] are not coming here in a bad mood but rather are coming peacefully,”⁵² suggesting that an agreement with the Spaniards was both possible and desirable. The Cazonci then decided not to commit suicide but was still apprehensive of the situation. This fact is confirmed in the *Relación* when Don Pedro describes a trip that the Cazonci made to the Valley of Mexico to meet with Cortés, in which his emotional state is described as follows: “And he departed for Mexico with all the nobles and *principales* (indigenous leaders) and caciques of the province and he went crying on the way...”⁵³

⁵¹ Jerónimo de Alcalá, *Relación de Michoacán* (Zamora, Mich.: El Colegio de Michoacán, 2008), 255.

⁵² Alcalá, *Relación de Michoacán*, 255.

⁵³ Alcalá, *Relación de Michoacán*, 263.

The *Relación de Michoacán* depicts the ruler of the Tarascan people as utterly demoralized by the arrival of the Spaniards, and unable to defend his dominion since he was too afraid. Thus he surrendered it unconditionally. On the other hand, the *Relación* also offers information suggesting a very different conclusion, not so much based on its narrative but on information about its production and the political milieu in which it was produced. First of all, the *Relación* was the result of a collaboration between the indigenous nobility and the Spanish colonial administration. The work was commissioned by the first viceroy of Mexico, Don Antonio de Mendoza, and completed by Fray Jerónimo de Alcalá, who worked with Tarascan nobles, primarily don Pedro Cuinarángari, to compile the information. Thus, the work was produced precisely when don Pedro was still governor of Michoacán, remaining in that position until his death in 1543. After don Pedro died the title of governor went back to the lineage of the Cazonci; first, to his eldest son, don Francisco Tariácuri, from 1543 to 1545, and then to his second son, don Antonio Huitziméngari, from 1545 to 1562. After them came a succession of indigenous nobles who held the title of governors and many other minor positions within the Province of Michoacán. This situation only changed at the end of the colonial period, with the introduction of the Bourbon Reforms.

It is clear that the Tarascan state, with its institutions and practices, did not collapse after the arrival of the Spaniards but rather continued to function according to pre-Hispanic modes of organization. Indeed, Delfina E. López Sarrelange asserts that “In general, pre-Hispanic characteristics of each region were kept, as long as they were not incompatible either with natural law or with Christian law, and some characteristics of the Spanish nobility were

impressed upon it.”⁵⁴ This observation is important as it is often believed that indigenous institutions were simply replaced by Spanish institutions after the Conquest. In reality the Spaniards were not interested in reinventing the wheel. They attempted to use already existing pre-Hispanic political structures and sought to place themselves at the top of the power pyramid.

In many ways, the Spaniard’s takeover of power in Michoacán resembled more a political *coup d’état* than an actual military occupation, as the Conquest is often perceived. The final part of this *coup d’état* was achieved in 1530 with the execution of the Caltzontzin, after a summary trial in which he was accused, among other things, of interfering with the encomiendas and of ordering the killing of many Spaniards. The trial record, or *proceso*, presents a different view of the Cazonci than the one in the *Relación*. The trial was carried out by the infamous Nuño de Guzmán, president of the first *Audiencia Real* (high court), who has been portrayed by most historians as a ruthless and bloody tyrant.

The most revealing part of the trial is when the Cazonci was asked, during his interrogation, if in the town of Uruapan he had ordered a Christian miner [a Spaniard] killed. He replied “no, why should he kill any Christian; if he had wanted to kill them he would have done so before, as soon as the land was conquered, at the time when they came to this province.”⁵⁵ This last statement indicates the Cazonci’s perspective of events. The *Relación* suggests that he was a cowardly ruler without conviction, whereas in his response to this question he boldly stated that he could have killed the Spaniards when they first arrived in Michoacán if he had

⁵⁴ Delfina Esmeralda López Sarrelangue, *La nobleza indígena de Pátzcuaro en la época virreinal* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1965), 18.

⁵⁵ J. Benedict Warren, *The Conquest of Michoacán: The Spanish Domination of the Tarascan Kingdom in Western Mexico, 1521-1530* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 226.

wanted to do so, despite the fact that he was being held captive and was subject to the constant threat of torture. This bold response suggests a certain degree of regret for not having done so.

In any case, it was too late. The Cazonci was powerless, his empire reduced to a province of New Spain. The Cazonci was in fact executed; first he was dragged by a horse as a punishment for his alleged crimes, and then he was burned alive. The death of the Cazonci surely marked a transformation in the political order of the Tarascan people of Michoacán. But the arrival of the Spaniards and the leader's execution did not bring about a total collapse of the Tarascan state. Rather, power at the top of the order shifted from the Tarascan nobility to the Spaniards. But many aspects of the pre-Hispanic Tarascan state survived and many Tarascan elites retained positions of power and privilege for many generations.

Population Movements to the North

Although the Cazonci's death did not bring about the end of the Tarascan nobility, it did subordinate them to Spanish interests, including the conquest of what would be called New Galicia. Ida Altman describes the execution of the Cazonci: "The violent conquest of New Galicia thus began with an act of judicial murder, but the decision to get rid of the Cazonci was pragmatic. Since Michoacan was the staging ground for an *entrada* into an only partially known and potentially hostile region, Guzmán needed to ensure that the former Purépecha kingdom would remain securely under Spanish control."⁵⁶ This concern was of course an important factor, but even more important was the manpower that Tarascans could provide to Spanish forces. Even before the Cazonci's execution, Tarascans had supported Spanish expeditions to the

⁵⁶ Ida Altman, *The War for Mexico's West: Indians and Spaniards in New Galicia, 1524-1550* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010), 34.

west and north; after the execution, Spaniards could count on the support of Tarascan forces with more certainty.

Thus, after his brief but consequential pass through Michoacán, Nuño de Guzmán continued his expedition to the north, into New Galicia. The area that Phillip C. Weigand has called the Trans-Tarascan zone and the Caxcana was engulfed by open rebellion from the time of the arrival of Guzmán's forces in 1530 until the end of the Mixtón War of 1541-1542.⁵⁷ In this war, as in other conquests, indigenous auxiliaries played a key role. Tarascan auxiliaries were especially effective since they had prior experience in this region. Tarascans had made incursions into the region as early as the mid-fifteenth century, conquering many towns but ultimately failing to maintain prolonged dominion over the region.⁵⁸ However, those military experiences gave them the intelligence that Spaniards used in their attempt to conquer the region: they understood the political and territorial rivalries that existed among the many different groups of the region, and they also knew its geography. Gúzman had taken some seven or eight thousand indigenous troops from central México at the start of his expedition, and requested eight thousand more from the Tarascan ruler, to make a total of about fifteen thousand indigenous auxiliaries.⁵⁹ As with previous groups, Tarascan forces were organized and commanded by their own principales, who in many cases may have thought of these expeditions as a continuation of pre-Hispanic conquests.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Weigand, "Territory and Resistance, Part 2," 84-89.

⁵⁸ Weigand, "Territory and Resistance, Part 2," 81-82.

⁵⁹ Altman, *The War for Mexico's West*, 27-28; Warren, *The Conquest of Michoacán*, 227-228.

⁶⁰ Warren, *The Conquest of Michoacán*, 228. Warren cites García del Pilar, a Spanish interpreter, who claimed that all the Tarascan auxiliaries, four or five thousand of them, were put in chains to prevent them from escaping. This is, of course, quite impractical. Warren states that most likely this did not occur, but rather their town lords were held hostages, probably in chains, to ensure the loyalty of their subjects. This is a more likely scenario, but it is also important to keep in mind that while the relationship between Spanish and Tarascan forces was certainly

The role played by these indigenous auxiliaries during the campaign is well known. Many were warriors, but a large number went as servants and porters.⁶¹ Altman mentions that “In addition to fighting for the Spaniards, the Indian troops and other auxiliaries recruited in central Mexico and Michoacan performed all the heaviest physical labor, including building bridges and rafts to cross the region’s numerous rivers, constructing churches and temporary housing, moving artillery and other heavy equipment, and, of course, carrying loads.”⁶² What is less known is what happened to these men once their roles as auxiliaries was completed. Very likely, most went back to their home towns. However, many others would remain in the region. That was the case with San Miguel Culiacan in 1540 where indigenous auxiliaries from central Mexico stayed after Guzmán’s expedition returned to the south, and they later joined Spanish forces heading to New Mexico.⁶³ Another example is that of the Nahuas, Tarascans, and Caxcans who participated in an expedition to what is now the U.S. Southwest and a number of them decided to stay there. Years later, an expedition to New Mexico and Arizona, led by Antonio de Espejo in 1582, found many of them still living there.⁶⁴

Although all expeditions to the north and south of Mexico did not intend to generate population movements, this is what in fact they achieved. Thousands of indigenous men and women were relocated, willingly or not. When the Mixtón War of 1540 broke out, Viceroy

asymmetric, the Spaniards depended on indigenous auxiliaries too much to risk antagonizing them. Most likely, a level of intimidation combined with incentives for cooperation was enough to maintain the forces necessary for the expedition.

⁶¹ Altman, *The War for Mexico’s West*, 28.

⁶² Altman, *The War for Mexico’s West*, 31.

⁶³ Altman, *The War for Mexico’s West*, 270.

⁶⁴ Altman, *The War for Mexico’s West*, 270.

Mendoza decided to head to the region to quell the rebellion, accompanied by an impressive army of twenty thousand to fifty thousand indigenous auxiliaries.⁶⁵ Even if we accept the lower limit of twenty thousand, it is still a large number of men. The expedition brought many sedentary indigenous men from central Mexico and Michoacán to the western front. As with many other expeditions that included many auxiliaries, it is unclear what happened to all the men. Weigand states that “In 1542 the last of the indigenous auxiliaries of Mendoza’s army were released in and around Etzatlán, probably still numbering well above 10,000. They were simply set loose in the countryside without any provision for their orderly return to Michoacán or central Mexico.”⁶⁶ Again, it is possible that many men simply stayed, mixed with the local indigenous population and began the long process of colonizing areas sparsely populated during the pre-Hispanic and early colonial periods.

The Road to the Mines

The discovery of silver deposits in the mid-sixteenth century, first in Zacatecas and later in Guanajuato, brought several indigenous groups who lived in the territory of those mining areas into direct conflict with Spaniards. These groups had already participated either directly or indirectly in the Mixtón War of 1540-1542, and understood the violence and destruction of which the Spaniards and their allies were capable. So, when the war began in 1550 they defended their territories ferociously. On the Spanish side were a great number of indigenous auxiliaries who provided military service as well as logistic and intelligence support that would serve the Spaniards well in their attempts to "pacify" the Chichimecas. Among the indigenous auxiliaries

⁶⁵ Weigand, “Territory and Resistance, Part 2,” 89.

⁶⁶ Weigand, “Territory and Resistance, Part 2,” 90.

were the Nahuas of central and eastern Mexico, Otomíes from Queretaro, Tarascans from Michoacán, and the recently conquered Caxcans from Jalisco and Zacatecas, among many others that the Spaniards had incorporated into their formidable army.

In spite of this overwhelming support, the war was not easily won and, in fact, Phillip Powell described the war in this territory as the longest indigenous war in North American history and the continent's first "full and constant contest between civilization and savagery."⁶⁷ The conflict lasted forty years in which the Spaniards adopted different strategies to defeat the Chichimecas. Prior to the start of the conflict, Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza planned a series of defensive moves to prevent what had happened in the west from happening in the interior. He planned a series of *presidios* (forts) to be built along the main roads leading to New Galicia. Also, he encouraged people to move north of the Lerma River into Chichimeca territory by providing assistance, protection, and land grants to those who dared take the risk, including Chichimecas who were willing to join the Spanish colonial system.⁶⁸ These incentives, combined with grants of *encomienda* and land titles to Spanish colonists, spurred a continuous population movement to the north. At this time, Spanish officials made a concerted effort to establish settlements throughout the region with sedentary indigenous people from central Mexico and Michoacán. However, these incentives were not enough, and in many cases tensions erupted between newcomers and Chichimecas.

From 1550 to 1560, the conflict escalated from isolated Chichimeca raids on roads and towns to more organized attacks on Spanish settlements. From 1560 to 1570, as the war dragged

⁶⁷ Philip W. Powell, *Soldiers, Indians, and Silver: The Northward Advance of New Spain, 1550-1600* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), vii. Powell's interpretation of a war of "civilization" vs "savagery" clearly shows his reliance on Santa María's work and views on these indigenous groups.

⁶⁸ Powell, *Soldiers, Indians and Silver*, 4.

on, many Spanish settlers in the region grew frustrated with the indecision of colonial authorities and demanded stronger measures. In response, from 1570 to 1585 authorities adopted a strategy of “guerra a fuego y a sangre” (war by fire and blood), by which the Spaniards attempted to subdue the Chichimecas at whatever cost. Many Spaniards seized the opportunity to commit all sorts of atrocities and to capture slaves to be sold throughout New Spain. However, these attempts to defeat the Chichimecas by force were unsuccessful and, in fact, counterproductive to Spanish interests. Consequently, beginning in 1585, Spaniards opted for a more “Christian remedy.”⁶⁹ They sought to neutralize the Chichimecas by incorporating them into the Spanish colonial system. This strategy came to be known as “peace by purchase” and would in fact lead to the war's end in 1590.⁷⁰

Besides securing the roads leading to and from the mines, as well as the mining centers themselves, the war was significant in that it developed institutions that would later become standard in future conquests: presidios, missions, and defensive settlements. Importantly, indigenous auxiliaries constituted both the main fighting force and the population of defensive settlements. In particular, Powell highlights the important role played by Otomíes and Tarascans, since they had previous knowledge of the region and had been in conflict with the Chichimecas before the arrival of the Spaniards.⁷¹ Although the war came to an official end in 1590, pockets of resistance and intermittent attacks on Spanish settlements continued. However, the Spaniards had managed to overcome the most important obstacle to reaching the mines. Thereafter, a

⁶⁹ Powell, *Soldiers, Indians and Silver*, 182-190.

⁷⁰ Powell, *Soldiers, Indians and Silver*, 196.

⁷¹ Powell, *Soldiers, Indians and Silver*, 200.

constant flow of people went to and from the mining centers—especially Zacatecas and Guanajuato.

The Otomíes and Tarascans in Guanajuato

The influx of people to Guanajuato had started long before the war began, and would continue unabated throughout the colonial period. Spaniards led the incursions, but they brought an untold number of indigenous men, women and children who would settle in and around the mines. An important, and well-documented case is that of the Otomíes. The Otomíes had made incursions into the area as auxiliaries of the Tarascans and Nahuas of central Mexico. However, when Tarascans and Nahuas withdrew in order to deal with the Spanish invasion of their territories, the Otomíes carried out their own colonization projects. David Wright has described a four-stage colonization of the Bajío by the Otomíes. First, there was a “clandestine” colonization from 1521 to 1538. It was clandestine in that it was carried out without the Spaniards’ consent. The Otomíes were integrated into the Spanish colonial system from 1538 to 1550. Next came the war from 1550 to 1590 in which the Otomíes mostly participated as auxiliaries of the Spanish armies attacking Chichimeca groups. Finally, after 1590, the Otomíes integrated with other indigenous groups in the Bajío.⁷² This last phase is difficult to explore as the integration led to a slow erosion of specific indigenous ethnic identities, at least from the Spanish perspective; Spaniards began to refer to many of these indigenous peoples as *indios ladinos* (acculturated indigenous people) and, later, simply as mestizos.

The Tarascans of Michoacán also had an important social, cultural, economic, and demographic impact on the region. The Tarascans played an important role in the conquest and

⁷² Powell, *Soldiers, Indians and Silver*, 55.

colonization of the northern territories, especially Guanajuato. They had already established a presence in the area prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. However, just like the Otomíes, they took advantage of the post-Conquest social and political conditions to advance into territories that they had either conquered or attempted to conquer in the pre-Hispanic period. One of these areas was the present-day state of Guanajuato. The demographic movement of people from Michoacán to Guanajuato is difficult to assess. First, there are not many reliable records to document these movements; most information comes from documents that offer only incidental references to the topic, such as criminal cases. Also, the nature of migration itself makes it difficult to determine with any precision who is moving where and when. However, despite these and other limitations, scholars have documented a demographic movement from Michoacán to Guanajuato, confirming the links between these two geographical areas.

Claude Morin has demonstrated that the oldest and most persistent migration in the region followed a south-north orientation. In fact, he goes as far as to say that: “It is not exaggerated to affirm that the Bajío region was throughout the sixteenth century and a good part of the next a demographic appendage of Michoacan.”⁷³ This assertion is justified by the fact that the mining industry and the founding of haciendas created a significant demand for workers that only indigenous communities could satisfy. For instance, landowners in León, Silao, and Celaya would send recruiters to communities in the Province of Michoacán to attract workers to work in their ranchos and haciendas.⁷⁴ Although at first most workers would go to Guanajuato—either in landed properties or in the mining industry—and come back to their communities, many simply

⁷³ Claude Morin, “Proceso demográfico, movimiento migratorio y mezclas raciales en el estado de Guanajuato y su contorno en la época virreinal,” *Relaciones* no. 16 (1983): 13.

⁷⁴ Morin, “Proceso demográfico,” 13.

decided to stay and take up residence either in haciendas, ranchos, mining towns, or in nearby communities where they could work their own lands and supplement their incomes by working in Spanish-owned enterprises.⁷⁵

There are many communities in the present-day state of Guanajuato where Tarascans and other indigenous groups settled in the region. Early examples of these are the towns of Pénjamo, Yuririapúndaro, and Acámbaro in southern Guanajuato. Pénjamo, in the Alcaldía Mayor of León (1579), was officially founded by the Spaniards in 1549 with a mix of Tarascans, Otomíes, an Chistianized Guamares.⁷⁶ Yuririapúndaro and Acámbaro, in the Alcaldía Mayor of Celaya (1571), were both included as towns conquered by the Tarascans in the fifteenth century.⁷⁷ In fact, Tarascan garrisons in both towns defended the Tarascan frontier in the pre-Hispanic period.⁷⁸ Otomí and Chichimeca residents also lived in these towns, but many more lived in dispersed rancherías only indirectly controlled by the towns.⁷⁹ Gerhard claims that the Chichimecas in Yuririapúndaro and Acámbaro were predominantly Guamares.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Morin, "Proceso demográfico," 13.

⁷⁶ Gerhard, *Guide*, 167.

⁷⁷ Gerhard, *Guide*, 64; Alcalá, *Relación de Michoacán*, 154-155.

⁷⁸ Gerhard, *Guide*, 65.

⁷⁹ Gerhard, *Guide*, 66. Gerhard mentions that in 1580 Acámbaro had a total of 44 sujetos, while Yuririapúndaro had 27.

⁸⁰ Gerhard, *Guide*, 65. However, it is important to point out that sources differ in their assessment of the ethnic groups living in these settlements. Powell, for example, claims that both Yuririapúndaro and Acámbaro were inhabited by Pames (Powell, *Soldiers, Indians and Silver*, 37), something which is backed by the *Guerra de los Chichimecas* (206), while Gorenstein argues that the Chichimeca population in Acámbaro was Guamares (Gorenstein, *Acámbaro*, 20). Most likely, the groups living in this complicated frontier region were in fact of mixed Chichimeca groups. Both Yuririapúndaro and Acámbaro were in a frontier zone that included Tarascans, Otomíes, Guamares, and Pames (as well as Nahuas in the case of Acámbaro), which would have led to inevitable mixing and confusion.

The town of Acámbaro exemplifies the situation in southern Guanajuato. Shirley Gorenstein, utilizing both archeological and documentary evidence, shows how this pre-Hispanic indigenous settlement of Guamares, Otomías, and later Tarascans led to the formation of a tripartite society in which Guamares and Otomías enjoyed a certain level of autonomy, in spite of Tarascan control.⁸¹ This pattern was carried over into the colonial period as each ethnic group was assigned separate barrios in the newly-founded San Francisco Acámbaro. Just as important, Gorenstein demonstrated that there was a discrepancy between the written sources—mainly the *Relación de Michoacán*—which claimed that Acámbaro had been fully integrated into the Tarascan political system, while the archeological record clearly pointed to a continued presence and dominance by local groups, especially the Otomías who Gorenstein claimed acted as facilitators between the Tarascans and Chichimeca groups in the region.⁸²

Besides helping to establish these important frontier settlements, both Tarascans and Otomías played a key role in the foundation and population of new settlements throughout Guanajuato, especially those leading to the mines. While war can be a very destructive force, it can also lead to significant change. There are few events that can bring together as many resources and people as war. This was the case in Guanajuato during the Chichimeca War. The war represented a significant threat to the Spanish colonial system and thus forced the viceregal

⁸¹ Shirley Gorenstein, *Acámbaro: Frontier Settlement on the Tarascan-Aztec Border* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 1985), 22.

⁸² Gorenstein, *Acámbaro*, 115. Gorenstein states that “The major facilitators of these processes may well have been the Otomí. The frontier region, taken over by the Tarascans on the one side, and the Aztecs on the other, was the historical territory of the Otomi. There were Otomi on both frontiers and, in fact, in both capitals. Knowing the terrain, the routes, and the indigenous population; they moved easily from frontier zone to frontier zone and from capital to capital serving as information carriers. Like the Tarascans and the Aztecs, the Otomi were from a tradition with experience and understanding of politics and government of high culture.”

government to invest heavily in defensive settlements and military campaigns, All these efforts relied on continued indigenous migration into the area.

Indigenous auxiliaries played a key role in the Rebelión de Nueva Galicia, the Mixtón War and, after 1550, the Chichimeca War. Again, the Tarascans played a vital role. Tarascan nobles, in particular, played a role that has been underappreciated if not ignored; like Otomí nobles, they were fully engaged in the conquest process.⁸³ For instance, don Diego Tomás Quesuchigua, who was said to be an illegitimate son of the Cazonci, helped Hernando Cortés in the conquest and pacification of Michoacán, services to the crown for which he was recognized by a royal decree of 1532, which gave him the title of *hidalgo* and confirmed his status as cacique and principal. He was later named captain general in the frontier war against the Guachichiles.⁸⁴ Furthermore, he was given a *merced* (land grant) to found the town of San Francisco Pénjamo, which measured ten thousand *varas* (about ten thousand yards) in all directions from the center; the new town was subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of the viceroy, and not to any other Spanish official. Moreover, don Diego was exempt from paying any tribute or *alcabala*, and was authorized to hold elections of the *oficiales de república* (indigenous town officials) for the new town.⁸⁵ Pénjamo, as indicated above, was an important frontier settlement; the viceregal government sought to colonize the area and prevent Chichimecas from overtaking

⁸³ For the Otomíes, see David Wright, *Conquistadores Otomíes en la Guerra Chichimeca* (Querétaro: Dirección de Patrimonio Cultural, Secretaría de Cultura y Bienestar Social, Gobierno del Estado de Querétaro, 1988).

⁸⁴ Felipe Castro Gutiérrez, *Los tarascos y el imperio español, 1600-1740* (Mexico City and Morelia: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, 2004), 46; López Sarrelangue, *La nobleza indígena*, 209.

⁸⁵ López Sarrelangue, *La nobleza indígena*, 209.

it. To this end, the viceroy considered the Tarascans as key allies and rewarded their collaboration in recruiting troops and colonists to populate this unstable frontier settlement.

Don Antonio Huitziméngari, son of the late Cazonci and indigenous governor of Michoacán from 1545 to 1562, is another Tarascan noble who played a vital role in the conquest and colonization process. After the death of his father in 1530, he lost many of the privileges that he had enjoyed from the time of his youth. In 1545 he appealed to the king, claiming that he had been left without any towns for his support. In that year, the king gave him a merced of 300 gold pesos, confirmed in a *cédula* of 1548, decreeing that he would be paid from the tributes of the province of Ávalos. But the viceroy had to issue another order in 1553, after royal officials refused to comply with the order.⁸⁶ In addition to this important income, don Antonio still received support—both in goods and services—from Tarascan *principales* in the area who recognized his status as the son of their last Cazonci.⁸⁷

In 1551, don Antonio Huitziméngari was ordered by Viceroy Velasco to gather a force of one thousand men, equipped for war, to go to San Miguel to fight Chichimeca warriors in the region. He was given the title of captain and was placed in command of the Tarascan *principales* and troops.⁸⁸ Just as important, Viceroy Velasco gave specific orders that the men under don Antonio's command would not be used as burden carriers, or to serve the Spaniards, unless it was directly related to the war and in the service of the king. Furthermore, he emphasized that they should be treated well, not to be harmed or bothered in any way, so that they would have no

⁸⁶ López Sarrelangue, *La nobleza indígena*, 174-175.

⁸⁷ López Sarrelangue, *La nobleza indígena*, 175.

⁸⁸ Carlos Paredes Martínez, "*Y por mi visto...*": *mandamientos, ordenanzas, licencias y otras disposiciones virreinales del siglo XVI* (Mexico City and Morelia: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, 1994), 76.

reason to complain and would obey the order to go with don Antonio to fight the Chichimecas.⁸⁹ Don Antonio was in fact able to bring the troops together and headed to Guanajuato where he engaged the Chichimecas in combat.

In fighting the Chichimecas, don Antonio is credited with founding three defensive settlements along the road from Michoacán to Zacatecas.⁹⁰ San Felipe, the most important of these three settlements, was founded in 1562 near the Tunal Grande and the San Francisco Valley, strongholds and population centers of the Guachichiles. According to Powell, within a decade of its founding, San Felipe and the presidio built there became the most important defensive outpost against the Guachichiles and one of the most important garrisons along the Zacatecas road.⁹¹ If it is not clear who exactly settled the town initially, it is very likely that at least some of don Antonio Huitziméngari's force of one thousand soldiers stayed in San Felipe. This case and many others of a similar nature show the important role played by the Tarascan nobility in the conquest and pacification of Guanajuato, and in subsequent colonization efforts after the war.

Institutions of Conquest and Resistance: Cofradía, Hospital, and República de Indios

When the Spaniards arrived to the Americas, they brought with them many institutions that would enable them to pacify, colonize, and ultimately control the many areas of their vast empire. In Michoacán, they introduced many institutions early on that had a deep and lasting impact on the whole region. Three in particular were very important: the *cofradía* (religious

⁸⁹ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 82-83.

⁹⁰ López Sarrelangue, *La nobleza indígena*, 176.

⁹¹ Powell, *Soldiers, Indians and Silver*, 69.

confraternity), the *hospital* (colonial period institution designed to provide general forms of assistance, including, but not limited to, healthcare), and the *república de indios* (indigenous town government).

The *cofradía* fulfilled important social, political, economic, and religious functions in colonial Michoacán in both indigenous and Spanish societies; in fact, *cofradías* often brought people of different groups into contact with one another. Dagmar Bechtloff argues that *cofradías* played an important role in creating what she calls an intercultural society in the region.⁹² The Spanish Crown considered the *cofradía* as a means to incorporate indigenous men and women into the Spanish colonial system, loosening their dependence on the Crown while entitling them to the same type of lay confraternity enjoyed by Spanish colonists.⁹³ Bechtloff also suggests that the participation of indigenous peoples in *cofradías* also diminished the likelihood of rebellions among the indigenous population.⁹⁴ Thus, by promoting indigenous *cofradías* that were independent of Spanish *cofradías*, the Crown created a separation between the two groups, which limited the influence and control that the colonists could exert over the indigenous population. The religious orders supported this policy because it kept the indigenous people, along with their labor, under their supervision. Ultimately, Bechtloff argues that *cofradías* succeeded throughout the colonial period precisely because they were well received by the indigenous population, supported by the Crown, and accepted by Spanish colonists, who had their own *cofradías*.⁹⁵

⁹² Dagmar Bechtloff, "La formación de una sociedad intercultural: las *cofradías* en el Michoacán colonial," *Historia Mexicana* 43, no. 2 (1993): 250.

⁹³ Bechtloff, "La formación de una sociedad intercultural," 250.

⁹⁴ Bechtloff, "La formación de una sociedad intercultural," 252.

⁹⁵ Bechtloff, "La formación de una sociedad intercultural," 253.

Cofradías also played an important role in indigenous society. The indigenous nobility of Pátzcuaro welcomed the introduction of cofradías because it allowed them to take back religious authority in their communities, but now under the Christian banner and under Spanish supervision.⁹⁶ The cofradías also fulfilled a significant economic function in organizing social, cultural, and religious celebrations, which helped to preserve a sense of community and unity within indigenous society. Migrant groups also used the cofradía to maintain a sense of ethnic identity when interacting with others, whether indigenous or Spanish.

The hospital was another important colonial institution in Michoacán, especially for migrant workers going to Guanajuato. Like the cofradía, the hospital provided a space where individuals from a common area and/or ethnic identity could meet and provide mutual assistance. Vasco de Quiroga is credited with founding the first hospital in the 1530s; Tarascan communities supposedly adopted it rapidly because of the respect they had for “tata” Quiroga.⁹⁷ However, it is very possible that the hospital had some type of pre-Hispanic precedent in Michoacán, which might account for how quickly Tarascans adopted it. In Michoacán, the hospital was also known as “huatápera,” derived from the word *uantajperakua*, which means “gathering place” in Purépecha.⁹⁸ Also significant is the fact that these institutions kept detailed records of their activities in what they called *pindecuarios*, which translates to “book of customs or traditions.”⁹⁹ Furthermore, many of the positions within this institution had Purépecha names—such as *carari*

⁹⁶ Bechtloff, “La formación de una sociedad intercultural,” 256.

⁹⁷ Mauricio Benjamín Jiménez Ramírez, “La construcción del discurso del patrimonio en la Huatápera de Uruapan,” (Master thesis, Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente, 2010), 73.

⁹⁸ Jiménez Ramírez, “La Huatápera,” 79.

⁹⁹ Tricia Gabany-Guerrero, “Deciphering the Symbolic Heritage of the Tarascan Empire: Interpreting the Political Economy of the Pueblo-Hospital of Parangaricutiro, Michoacán” (PhD dissertation, University at Albany, State University of New York, 1999), 51.

(writer), *quengue* (official in charge of overseeing corn storage), and *huanánchecha* (women in charge of the image of the Virgin), some of which are documented in the *Relación de Michoacán*—and some are still used today.¹⁰⁰ The Tarascans quickly adopted the hospital and used it throughout Michoacán and everywhere they went. When silver was discovered in Guanajuato in the mid-sixteenth century, the Tarascans made their way to the mines and brought with them the institutions that could help them recreate community practices and maintain a strong sense of ethnic identity. By 1560 the Tarascans had built a hospital and a chapel; two other hospitals, one for Otomíes and one for “mexicanos,” (Nahuas) were also established in those early years.¹⁰¹

The *república de indios* was the third important institution of colonization established throughout New Spain. The *república de indios* allowed some level of autonomy for indigenous towns and became an important element in the delicate balance of power established by the Spanish colonial system. In Michoacán, these institutions were established early on; the local states of Michoacán, like their counterparts in Nahua central Mexico, simply adjusted to Spanish demands without transforming native settlement patterns or modes of organization. In fact, some of these *repúblicas de indios* in Michoacán continued to play powerful roles in the region. The

¹⁰⁰ Gabany-Guerrero, “The Pueblo-Hospital of Parangaricutiro,” 204; Alcalá, *Relación de Michoacán*, 179; Jiménez Ramírez, “La Huatápera,” 79.

¹⁰¹ Tiburcio Álvarez, *Las minas de Guanajuato* (Guanajuato: Museo de la Alhóndiga de Granaditas, 1977), 14. These hospitals were located in what later came to be known simply as “calle de los hospitales,” (street of the hospitals). The fact that the hospitals were in such proximity raises many important questions. In particular, it is unclear what role, if any, the proximity of the hospitals to each other played in creating, like Bechtloff has argued was the case with the *cofradía*, intercultural societies. In other words, it is unclear whether hospitals played a role in promoting interethnic indigenous interactions, collaborations, and marriages, ultimately leading to an undifferentiated mix of indigenous peoples.

república de indios of Pátzcuaro, for example, provided an important counterweight to the presence of powerful Spanish officials in the first capital of the Province of Michoacán.¹⁰²

When the Spaniards arrived, some of the frontier settlements in southern Guanajuato, such as Pénjamo, Yuririapúndaro, and Acámbaro, were either already inhabited by Tarascans and Otomíes. These two groups had ample experience in self-government and thus rapidly adopted the model of the república de indios to serve their interests. However, farther to the north, in Chichimeca territory, repúblicas de indios were not as easy to establish. This difference was due in part due to the migratory nature of the population in the north, conflicts in the area from 1550 to 1590, and the lack of a pre-Hispanic precedent of permanent settlements. However, in the early seventeenth century, when towns began to experience a sustained demographic growth due to consistent migrations of indigenous groups from central and western Mexico, many towns started to petition to establish their own repúblicas de indios.¹⁰³ Such was the case, for example, of the town of Purísima Concepción del Rincón, in the alcaldía mayor of León, which was established in 1632. A group of indigenous people from San Francisco del Rincón sought to found their own independent town, but it was still subordinate to San Francisco del Rincón as a *sujeto* (subject town) to the *cabecera* (head town). With San Francisco del Rincón's support, they asked the viceroy to be allowed to become an independent town, with its own república de indios, and was granted permission to do so in 1649.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² On the república de indios of Pátzcuaro, see, for example, Felipe Castro Gutiérrez, "Alborotos y siniestras relaciones: la república de indios de Pátzcuaro colonial," *Relaciones. Estudios de historia y sociedad* 23, no. 89 (2002).

¹⁰³ José Tomás Falcón Gutiérrez, "Los pueblos de indios de la alcaldía mayor de León, 1630-1790", (Master thesis, El Colegio de Michoacán, 2003), 119.

¹⁰⁴ Falcón Gutiérrez, "Los pueblos de indios," 118.

This process of forming new repúblicas de indios would continue unabated in the alcaldías mayores of León and Celaya throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The viceregal government allowed groups to found their own indigenous towns, governed by their local councils, as a strategy to establish greater control of the region. In places where this prospect conflicted with Spanish interests, however, the process could involve long, protracted legal conflicts that would raise the very question of who could and could not be considered indigenous. While the foundation of new indigenous towns often worked to the benefit of viceregal authorities and the Spanish Crown, it nevertheless represented a serious obstacle and threat to the hegemony of Spanish colonists, who jealously defended their right to control the region. Thus, in places closer to the mines, with a stronger Spanish presence and/or control, indigenous people encountered more serious obstacles to their attempts to form repúblicas de indios. This was the case in the alcaldía mayor of Guanajuato, with its subject towns of Silao and Irapuato, which not only included many very profitable mines, but also many estancias, ranchos, and haciendas whose Spanish owners considered indigenous institutions as a menace to their economic interests.

Conclusion

The areas of the present-day states of Michoacán and Guanajuato have many historical processes in common, both in the pre-Hispanic and colonial periods. Their geographic proximity and constant population movements have created what I call a single, complex region. Guanajuato was originally inhabited by Chichimeca groups, but the discovery of silver first in Zacatecas and later in Guanajuato rapidly changed the nature of the population. Spaniards, people of African descent, and many other indigenous groups migrated to the region. Nahuas,

Otomíes, and Tarascans came as auxiliaries to the Spaniards and settled in the region, helping the Spaniards to fight the Chichimecas and later to establish defensive settlements. Once indigenous groups settled in towns, they would use Spanish institutions—such as the *cofradía*, hospital, and *repúblicas de indios*—to maintain some degree of autonomy from the dominant Spanish groups and to maintain certain social and cultural practices. If war and the attempt to pacify the Chichimecas in Guanajuato led to the initial process of migration to the region, it was not enough to sustain a growing demand for workers in the Guanajuato mining center. In the next chapter, I will examine labor institutions utilized to recruit workers to the mines in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the impact of this process on the short- and long-term population movements in the region.

CHAPTER 2

The Mining Industry and Its Workers, 1550-1700

The wealth of precious metals motivated Spaniards to conquer the New World. Wherever they went, they immediately looted all available gold and silver from indigenous populations, and when they exhausted this resource, they set out to find the mines from which these metals had been obtained. The Spaniards had been engaged in mining operations in the Caribbean islands since they arrived in the late fifteenth century, but the size of these operations could be considered negligible compared to what they would find in New Spain and the Andes. However, the Spaniards established a model in Cuba and Española for subsequent conquests. Spaniards relied on forced indigenous labor to work the mines, either through slavery or *encomiendas*. In doing so, they committed innumerable abuses and contributed directly to the decline of indigenous populations, who were prone to die in the mines or to run away from their overseers. Many people alerted this problem to the Spanish king who, through a series of decrees, began to regulate the use of indigenous peoples for work in the mines. Eventually, a system that included slavery, forced labor, and free labor emerged.

The Mining Industry in New Spain

After the conquest of Mexico in 1521, the Spaniards set out on a desperate search for mines. The desperation was no surprise, considering many men had accrued significant debts to participate in the conquests and needed to pay back their creditors with the most widely accepted commodity at the time: precious metals. Consequently, one of the first questions that Spaniards posed to indigenous leaders wherever they went was where they could find gold and silver, the two most coveted metals. Broadly speaking, the discovery of the mines in New Spain took place

in three phases. First, Spaniards explored mines that had already been worked by indigenous groups. Often, indigenous people would simply continue to work these mines in the colonial period, as was the case with the Inguarán mines of Michoacán. Secondly, from the 1520s to the mid-sixteenth century, Spaniards searched for, located and exploited mines near the Valley of Mexico. These include those in the so-called “Provincia de la Plata,” which included the mining centers of Temascaltepec, Zultepec, Zacualpan, and Taxco.¹ Finally, the discovery of the most productive mines of New Spain began in the second half of the sixteenth century. These included the mines of Zacatecas, Real del Monte, and Guanajuato, which became the most productive silver mines not only in New Spain but in the world.

Labor Institutions

Silver mining drove the economy of colonial Mexico. The lucrative enterprise relied on a constant labor force. In New Spain the methods employed to obtain labor for the mines differed across region and time, but generally speaking there were three main forms of labor: slavery, forms of periodic forced labor, and free wage-labor. In the beginning of the colonial period, Spaniards relied on African slaves, their descendants, and indigenous men captured in so-called “just wars.”² African slaves could be found in most mining towns; in the beginning of the colonial period they constituted a significant part of the mining labor force. However, they were in high demand and thus expensive; whenever possible, Spaniards replaced African slaves with

¹ Jaime García Mendoza, “La formación de grupos de poder en la Provincia de la Plata en el siglo XVI,” (PhD dissertation, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2002).

² Jorge Chapa, “Wage Labor in the Periphery: Silver Mining in Colonial Mexico,” *Review* 4, no. 3 (Winter 1981): 513; Robert S. Haskett, “‘Our Suffering with the Taxco Tribute’: Involuntary Mine Labor and Indigenous Society in Central New Spain,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 71, no. 3 (August 1991): 452-453.

indigenous workers recruited from indigenous towns in the vicinity of the mines. The enslavement of Indians was prevalent in the early colonial period, but by the mid-sixteenth century, it was prohibited by the Spanish Crown in areas that had been "pacified." In those areas of the north that had not been pacified, slaveing continued throughout the sixteenth century and beyond. Despite this major exception, and the fact that some Spanish colonists and colonial administrators often ignored this legislation in the early period, the number of indigenous slaves dwindled over time, along with the population in general. Thus, if slavery was an important source of mine labor in the early colonial period, it diminished in significance once formal mechanisms were established to tap into indigenous labor, which were supplemented by free wage labor. In some places, slavery may have constituted up to ten percent of the total labor force in the mines.³

There were two main forms of organized coerced labor in the early colonial period in New Spain. First, the Spaniards used *encomiendas*. The *encomendero* could either utilize the workers to work in their own enterprises or they could rent out the labor of their *encomendados* (*encomienda* Indians) to other individuals. Although the latter practice was prohibited by the Crown it was still a common occurrence until the *encomienda* itself was abolished through a series of decrees beginning with the New Laws of 1542.⁴ The *encomienda* was not abolished everywhere, but another form of forced labor was developed: the *repartimiento*. The

³ Chapa, "Wage Labor in the Periphery," 513. Indigenous slave labor in the mines is an important topic that deserves more attention, even if the number of people that were classified as such may have been limited. Phillip Powell, among other scholars, has pointed out that the slavery of indigenous men and women during the Chichimeca War was a principal cause of resistance among indigenous groups in the region, and that a negotiated peace was possible only after the practice was stopped.

⁴ For a general discussion of the *encomienda* and the New Laws of 1542, in particular, see Lewis Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), 83-105.

repartimiento was a grant (to a Spaniard) of forced paid labor obtained from indigenous communities for a limited time period. The daily wages that repartimiento workers received was determined by viceregal authorities, but was significantly below market value. In part, access to workers that could be paid less than workers hired in the free market, was an incentive for employers to use the repartimiento system. One important difference between encomienda and repartimiento is that with repartimiento the workers were not directly controlled by the colonist themselves, but rather by a government official who was supposed to be an intermediary between the colonist and the indigenous people recruited for this kind of labor.⁵

Thus, the repartimiento placed very specific limits on what could and could not be done by the colonists. For example, it limited the number of workers from a specific town that could be recruited to four percent of the total tributary population per week. Also, it limited labor for mines to only those communities within twenty leagues⁶ of the mines, and specified that workers could not be taken from one type of climate to another, as this was considered a health hazard.⁷ There was, of course, a gap between the law and reality, but indigenous communities were quick to challenge colonial authorities when the laws were violated. In fact, over the course of the long colonial period progressed, many indigenous communities came to resent and even detest the repartimiento.

Free wage labor was a third source of labor for the mines. Most scholars agree that this wage labor became the predominant form of labor used by miners in colonial New Spain. For example, Jorge Chapa—focusing on the case of the Real del Monte in present-day Hidalgo—

⁵ Chapa, “Wage Labor in the Periphery,” 512-513.

⁶ 1 league is equivalent to approximately 2.6 miles. Therefore, the limit of 20 leagues is approximately 52 miles. *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/333855/league>.

⁷ Haskett, “Our Suffering with the Taxco Tribute,” 457-458.

claimed that “the typical Mexican mine worker was formally free, geographically mobile, and well paid.”⁸ In a well-known work on Zacatecas, Peter Bakewell also suggests that workers tended to be free-wage workers since there were no reliable sedentary populations in the vicinity of the Zacatecas mining district from which workers could be recruited by repartimiento drafts.⁹ David A. Brading suggests a similar situation for the Guanajuato mines: “Mexican mine-workers, far from being the oppressed peons of legend, constituted a free, well-paid, geographically mobile labor force which in many areas acted as the virtual partners of the owners.”¹⁰ Brading frequently reiterates this claim and even suggests that the mine workers formed a sort of “labor aristocracy”¹¹ in that many mines were actually unprofitable to the owners because so many profits went to the workers.¹² While this may have been the case with some of the mine workers, many more were not as well compensated or well treated. It is true that highly skilled mine workers were in high demand, and miners would compete for this skilled labor force, but the unskilled workers were more expendable and a certain amount of coercion often was needed to retain them at low wages and in dangerous working conditions.

While Chapa, Bakewell, and Brading have rightly emphasized the prevalence of free wage-labor—especially by the late colonial period—they have also minimized the significance of the use of coercion in the recruitment of labor, either formally through the use of *encomiendas*, repartimiento drafts, or through other less formal forms of coercion, such as debt

⁸ Chapa, “Wage Labor in the Periphery,” 513.

⁹ Peter J. Bakewell, *Silver Mining and Society in Colonial Mexico: Zacatecas, 1546-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 121-122.

¹⁰ Brading, *Miners and Merchants*, 146.

¹¹ Brading, *Miners and Merchants*, 8.

¹² Brading, *Miners and Merchants*, 275.

peonage. All these forms of labor recruitment were utilized throughout the Colonial period in the Guanajuato-Michoacán region and will be considered in the following two chapters.

From Encomienda to Repartimiento Labor

Encomenderos controlled labor in the early decades of New Spain. However, it quickly became clear to the crown that whoever controlled the labor force controlled the wealth of the colony. Thus, the king moved quickly to take control of this important resource. The New Laws of 1542 were designed to limit and ultimately strip the encomenderos of this privilege. The New Laws first set limits on the duration of encomiendas, initially given in perpetuity. Encomiendas could be enjoyed for one generation after the initial grant. Also, the New Laws prohibited encomenderos from obtaining labor service from their encomendados. Under these new rules, the encomenderos were forced to compete for labor in the free market or repartimiento drafts.

In a study on the mita of colonial Potosí, Jeffrey A. Cole has argued that colonial authorities, by positioning themselves as intermediaries between the miners who needed the labor and the workers who were required to go to the mines on turns of service, were able to utilize the mita as a form of social and political control. Cole claims that legislation on the mita, which had many regulations in favor of indigenous communities, was not only meant to protect indigenous men from the abuses of mine owners, but also to control local elites.¹³ Thus, the Spanish Crown could utilize the mita system both as a reward to complying American elites and as a punishment to rebellious individuals. From this perspective, the mita system became an important component in the checks-and-balances system developed by the Spanish colonial

¹³ Jeffrey A. Cole, *The Potosí Mita, 1573-1700: Compulsory Indian Labor in the Andes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 129.

administration to control and limit the power of the local elites. The same could be said of the repartimiento system in New Spain.

The transition from encomienda to repartimiento labor did not take occur overnight. The transition required several steps. First, encomenderos had to stop using labor from their encomiendas. This requirement was specifically addressed in a 1549 order by viceroy Antonio de Mendoza outlawing the practice. This step was the beginning of the end of encomienda labor. Viceroy Luis de Velasco initiated this process, but most of the changes occurred under Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza. In 1551 Velasco reiterated an order issued by Mendoza the previous year. In that order, the viceroy ordered the construction of a road from the city of Michoacán (Pátzcuaro) to Curucupatzeo.¹⁴ He had ordered indigenous workers from nearby communities to be employed in building the road. While most of the road had been built by April of 1551, it remained unfinished. The work had been stopped because the viceroy who had issued the order was no longer in office.¹⁵ Don Luis de Velasco simply confirmed the order, sending a clear message that what had been begun by Mendoza was not going to be halted under the new viceroy, but rather continued and even intensified¹⁶

There are many other cases in this period which indicate a resistance to this type of coerced labor. For example, on January 31, 1551 the town of Taximaroa complained against their encomendero, Gonzalo de Salazar, for employing them in his sugar refinery. They claimed

¹⁴ Curucupatzeo would eventually become an important silver mining center. It is unclear if the motivation to open a road to Curucupatzeo was related to the mining activity in this center at that time, but it is very likely that that was the case.

¹⁵ It is unclear who stopped the work, but very possibly it was the indigenous communities more directly affected by this labor imposition.

¹⁶ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 46-47.

that they already provided him with cloth and other products to satisfy their tribute requirements, but he still demanded two hundred of them to work at his refinery. Advancing a complaint voiced by many indigenous communities in this period, they claimed that their town was being depopulated and ruined by providing this service. Viceroy Velasco's response reflected the goals of his administration and the role that he and future administrations would play in establishing the superiority of his authority. He ordered, unequivocally, that Taximaroa could not be forced to provide any type of service for the refinery, that a local representative would be in charge of assessing the tribute that the people of this town would be required to provide to Salazar, excluding any type of personal service.¹⁷

However, having issued the above-mentioned order, the viceroy went on to issue another one on April 22, 1551. Whereas he had denied the encomendero direct access to the labor force, he found a way to provide the necessary workers that Salazar needed for his enterprises in the region. He ordered the workers from Taximaroa to go to Salazar's sugar refinery in Zitácuaro as "hired workers and voluntarily," under the condition that they would only work in the sugar-cane plantation and not in the refinery.¹⁸ He also clarified that they were to be paid at the established rate of twelve maravedís per day, and that it would be understood that the workers would go of their own free will and that they would not be forced or compelled to do so in any way.¹⁹ This "free wage labor" solution was, of course, a contradiction, in that the viceroy commanded the community of Taximaroa to work for the Spaniard. Since the order

¹⁷ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 40-41.

¹⁸ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 48.

¹⁹ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 48.

required the encomendero to meet certain conditions which, at least in theory, minimized some of the worst abuses that had troubled the community, it was interpreted as free wage labor.

In the same year, the community of Tacámbaro submitted a complaint against their encomendero, Cristobal de Oñate. In their request, they asked for their tribute to be moderated, as they considered it to be excessive; they also asked to be exempt from providing mine labor. It is unclear to which mines they referred, perhaps the copper mines of Inguarán, which were fully operational at that time and were approximately twenty leagues away. Again, the viceroy agreed with the indigenous principales who had made the trip to Mexico to plead their case, and established in a very clear way that they would not be required to provide service to the mines.²⁰ Both of these cases highlight the importance that the viceroy and his administration gave to complaints against labor being used for an encomendero's businesses, as in the case of the sugar refinery in Taximaroa, or against renting out labor to other enterprises, as in the case of the workers from Tacámbaro.

Encomienda Labor in the Mining Industry

Some encomenderos rented out their workers to mining operations in the region. The extent to which encomienda labor was used for these operations is unknown since much of it went unrecorded. However, existing evidence suggests that the practice began early and became widespread. One such example comes from the town of Taimeo, subject to Zinapécuaro. In 1552 this town complained to the viceroy that they were forced by their encomendero, Pedro de Ávila, to provide service to the Taxco mines, approximately 77 leagues (200 miles) away. On receiving the notice, the viceroy responded that in spite of the prohibition sent directly from the Spanish

²⁰ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 83.

king that no indigenous worker was to go to the mines to perform "personal service" and that if such service was taking place for it to be stopped immediately, he was notified that workers from this town were still being forced to go to the Taxco mines, along with those of the encomiendas of Juan de Cabra (Nochtepec), Francisco Rodriguez (Tetela), and Alonso de la Serna (Zumpahuacán).²¹

The viceroy then ordered the *alcalde mayor* of the Taxco mining center to issue an order for the indigenous workers and the *principales* from those towns to appear before him and for him to communicate directly to them that they are not to serve in the mines for any reason from that time on. The viceroy emphasized that even if the workers declared that they wanted to stay of their own free will, they were to be sent back to their towns and told not to return.

Furthermore, the *alcalde mayor* was to communicate to the *principales* of those towns that they, along with the governors of those towns, were to appear in front of the Real Audiencia to hear the decision directly from the judges and to establish their new tributary responsibilities, which excluded any type of service. The viceroy ended by highlighting the importance of executing this order "as something of importance to the service of his Majesty."²² The *alcalde mayor* was informed that he would be fined one-hundred gold pesos if he did not carry out the orders as instructed, and in his *residencia* (judicial review) he would be charged with negligence and omission of duty. Finally, the viceroy ordered the *alcalde mayor* to send him the proceedings showing the actions he had taken to fulfill his responsibility.²³

²¹ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 127.

²² Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 127.

²³ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 127.

As with the preceding examples, this case demonstrates the viceroy's determination to wrest control of the labor force, especially in the mining industry, from encomenderos. In this case, he was targeting four different encomenderos who were still sending workers to the Taxco mines. The tone of his message was direct and categorical; no more workers were to go to the mines from those towns, even if they said they wanted to go. Of course, later he and other viceroys would send workers to the mines using the dreaded repartimiento labor draft, but at that time priority was given to denying that privilege to the encomenderos and to establishing the viceroy's authority to regulate their labor.

Local Authorities and the Labor Force

In their efforts to centralize labor, the viceroys did not only have to discipline encomenderos, they also had to limit the authority of other groups who, up to that time, had controlled at least some part of the labor force. This included the clergy, local Spanish authorities (such as *alcaldes mayores*), and indigenous *principales*, all who had exercised some level of control over the labor force. An example, involves the communities of Gauaracha, Xuroneo, Cahao, Pajacuarán, and Ixtlán, all subject to Jacona, whose authorities submitted a complaint against their *principales*, *alguacil* (bailiff), and *nahuatlatos*.²⁴ Leaders of these communities claimed that they suffered under onerous labor demands and were forced to serve as *tamemes* (carriers), which was unacceptable since they were free people and, as such, could not be compelled to do so against their will.²⁵ The viceroy sided with the communities and ordered that

²⁴ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 64. The *nahuatlatos* probably referred to the translators. *Nahuatlato* was the generic term given to this profession since Nahuatl served as a type of *lingua franca* in both the pre-Hispanic and early colonial periods.

²⁵ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 64-65.

no person should compel them to serve by force, threats, or any other illegal means. To emphasize his point, the viceroy set a fine of one hundred gold pesos to any one who disobeyed his orders. While it is unclear in this case and many others whether the viceroy's orders were in fact followed, the spirit of response indicates the intent of the Spanish colonial administration to provide legal recourse to different groups within the colony who were entitled by law to bring their grievances before the viceroy and the Real Audiencia. In doing so, the viceroy established himself as the ultimate authority, above all others, in controlling the labor force.

Again in 1551 the indigenous community of Acámbaro complained to the viceroy that they were forced to provide labor to individuals and for public works in the city of Michoacán.²⁶ The viceroy ordered the alcalde mayor of the Province of Michoacán not to allow indigenous men to go from Acámbaro to that city against their will. More significantly, he emphasized that they were not to be compelled to provide any type of service unless he himself had ordered it. This provision established in no uncertain terms that it was he, and only he, who could adjudicate labor services for whatever purpose. The viceroy clarified that the workers from Acámbaro should not go even if they were being paid for their work, unless, again, it was ordered by him. He also set the punishment for going against his order at the considerable amount of one hundred gold pesos.²⁷

After dominating the power to control labor in the region, the viceroy set out to provide for the city of Michoacán's labor needs. Just a few months after prohibiting workers of

²⁶ There is some confusion as to what "ciudad de Mechuacan" the document refers to. Both Pátzcuaro and Valladolid (present-day Morelia) held that title at different points. And while in 1551 it was Valladolid which technically was the "ciudad de Mechuacan," many still referred to Pátzcuaro with that name. In this case, the document seems to be referring to Pátzcuaro and in what follows we will use it that way.

²⁷ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 77-78.

Acámbaro from being forced to go to the city of Michoacán, he ordered the communities of Capula, and Jaso y Teremendo to contribute laborers for the construction and repair of two bridges in the city.²⁸ On that same day, he issued a broader order requesting the *alcalde mayor* to assign workers located within twelve leagues of the city to Spanish *sementeras* (sown land). However, he emphasized that the workers were to be treated properly and paid fairly. He stated: "...and you will order that above all things, their work is to be paid at twelve maravedís, and the work has to be moderate."²⁹ One day later, the viceroy issued yet another order for the same city, along the same lines. This time, he ordered workers to build houses and other structures in the city for Spanish residents who suffered from a lack of suitable housing. In this case, however, the Spaniards asked for both unskilled laborers and skilled craftsmen who could work in building the new residences. The viceroy ordered laborers and skilled craftsmen living within a radius of twelve leagues to provide the necessary work. He instructed the Spaniards to properly compensate the workers at a rate of twelve maravedís per day while the skilled craftsmen would get twenty-four maravedís per day.³⁰

Similarly, Erongarícuaro and Zirándaro, both subject to Pátzcuaro, submitted in 1552 a complaint in which they objected to being forced by the *alcalde mayor* and other authorities to provide workers to Guayangareo (later Valladolid), and how they were forced to carry heavy burdens to the city as *tamemes*. The viceroy ordered that neither the *alcalde mayor* nor any other local authority could force workers to go to Guayangareo against their will. Also, he reiterated that they could not be forced to carry things as *tamemes*, as this practice was illegal. He further

²⁸ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 89.

²⁹ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 90.

³⁰ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 90-91.

emphasized that the workers should be left free to work their lands so that they could properly support their families and communities.³¹ By arguing for the well-being of the workers and their families, viceroy Velasco established his authority to regulate the labor force in the region on the grounds that he was acting as an intermediary to protect the rights of indigenous communities and for their wellbeing.

Ironically, the viceroy's will was reinforced by an order of November, 1552, in which he ordered that workers should not be restricted from going to Guayangareo to work in the city of their own free will. The document claimed that people from the communities of the Lake Pátzcuaro region (including Erongarícuaro and Zirándaro) wanted to work in that city without being compelled to do so, but some people (it is not clear who these people were) prevented them from doing so. Thus the viceroy ordered that nobody, regardless of their status, should prevent workers from the lake region to go of their own free will to work in that city, as long as they were being properly compensated.³² Thus, in the case of the communities from the Lake Pátzcuaro region, the viceroy forbade workers from being forced to go to Guayangareo, and then he forbade local authorities (of any status, most likely including indigenous authorities) from prohibiting workers from going to that city of their own free will. Again, he alone could regulate the labor force—either in assigning it or in restricting it—among local authorities, whether at the community, city, or provincial levels.

If encomenderos were no longer in charge of the labor force, they were nonetheless involved in many decisions concerning workers. For instance, in 1553 Juan Infante, encomendero in the lake Pátzcuaro region, received permission to employ some of his

³¹ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 110.

³² Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 130.

encomendados in the work of the house and monastery of the Franciscans in Guayangareo. Juan Infante had decided to help the Franciscans with workers from his encomienda. But, with the new changes in legislation, his workers were being taken away to serve in other places. He requested permission to keep his encomendados employed in the monastery until the project was completed. In response, Velasco issued the order to recruit workers from the Lake Pátzcuaro communities for the above-mentioned project, with the provision that they would receive a fair wage from Juan Infante, who financed the project. Also, he established that the alcalde mayor of Michoacán should ensure that the workers were not assigned to work elsewhere until the project had been completed.³³

Assigning Labor to Particulars

In centralizing the decision-making process of assigning labor, the Viceroy Mendoza's decisions affected Spanish colonists, including encomenderos and local authorities, who had come to depend on labor institutions for many of their enterprises. This had been the goal of the colonial administration. Whereas encomenderos were still able to obtain tribute from their encomiendas, the labor force was now in the hands of viceregal authorities who could assign workers as they pleased. In 1552, the viceroy instructed Juan de Jaso, *corregidor* (district magistrate) of Yuririapúndaro, to allocate indigenous workers from the community of Huango for work on the lands of Juan de Villaseñor, with the only provision that he should “pay them to their satisfaction.”³⁴ This order was reissued a year later in 1553 when the same was requested.³⁵

³³ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 136.

³⁴ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 129.

³⁵ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 141.

Thus, although the order was carried out by the Corregidor of Yuririapúndaro, it came directly from the viceroy himself, who had clearly established himself as the ultimate authority on this matter.

Similarly, in 1553 the same corregidor was instructed to provide workers to Pero Núñez and Rodrigo Vázquez, who had an estancia that needed to be repaired and defended from attack by Chichimeca Indians. Núñez and Vázquez argued that indigenous workers from Yurirapúndaro and its subject towns should be compelled to go there, or else their enterprises in the region would be at risk. However, the Spaniards made it clear that they would pay the workers a fair salary. The viceroy accepted the petition and ordered the corregidor to request “por todo rigor” (with full rigor) the necessary workers from the nearby communities, making sure that they were paid, in his presence if necessary, so that they would have no reason to complain and would not abandon their work.³⁶

In nearby Acámbaro, Hernán Pérez de Bocanegra had the same problem. In the past, he had obtained men through personal service³⁷ to work on his estancias and to take care of his livestock. However, that service had been taken away from him and now he had difficulty recruiting workers for his enterprises. He requested the viceroy to provide the workers, for which he was willing to pay a fair salary; otherwise his businesses would collapse. The viceroy agreed and assigned forty workers for his farms and sementeras. He ordered that those working on the farms, taking care of the livestock, should receive five silver reales per month, plus food, whereas those working in agriculture would receive two and a half silver reales for every six

³⁶ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 144-145.

³⁷ It is unclear if this was through an encomienda or through some other mechanism.

days of work, and five silver reales per week for officials.³⁸ This example illustrates how the viceroy continued to supply local enterprises with labor from the same communities that had provided labor to local authorities, but now everything was under his authority. It is unclear if the viceroy's involvement improved working conditions or checked abuses, but it did lead to a certain standardization of payment. Whereas the viceroy established the amount that workers were to be paid, wages varied greatly among local officials.

Labor and Indigenous Elites

One important outcome of the viceroy's aggressive attempt to control the labor force was that even indigenous officials lost some of the control they had over workers in their own communities. Indigenous nobles throughout New Spain began to lose control over local resources as soon as Spaniards took control of their regions. Although many still provided important services to the crown and played important roles in organizing and administering their communities, they nonetheless lost much of their power over time. This process was evident by the last quarter of the sixteenth century, when indigenous elites were forced to request permission from the viceroy to receive monetary compensation and labor from their own communities.

Such was the case with Tiripetío, which in 1574 had to request permission to pay their governor, Francisco Baximbo, for his services. They asked permission from Viceroy don Martín Enríquez to pay the governor twenty gold pesos from the tribute surplus, and provide him workers for his lands and domestic service from Tiripetío and its subject towns. The viceroy approved the petition and assigned the necessary workers to work the governor's land, which

³⁸ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 153-154.

produced a harvest of thirty *fanegas* (about forty-five bushels) of corn and three-hundred of beans. They also provided the governor with two male and two female domestic workers per week. As with other workers that the viceroy assigned, he established clear restrictions, aimed both to set limits but also to make clear that it was he who was in charge. The viceroy established the domestic workers' wages at two cacao beans per day and food, admonishing the governor that they had to be treated well and paid in a timely manner. At the same time, the viceroy prohibited the governor from receiving any other service or salary from the community; if he did, he would be forced to pay four times the amount that he received and would be exiled from the town for four years.³⁹ Such a harsh punishment was designed to send a clear message to indigenous authorities--they they were subject to the viceroy's power and would suffer if they disregarded him.

Similarly, in 1575 the community of Zirándaro requested to be allowed to provide service to their governor, Ambrosio Arisma, since they did not have money remaining from their tribute payments. The viceroy acceded to their request and ordered them to work a corn sementera of eighty square *brazas* (approximately 480 square feet), specifying that the commoners would sow and harvest the corn, and would transport it to his house. He also specified that all men would be equally responsible to take turns working the land. Finally, he warned that the governor was to receive no other service or salary, subject to the same penalty of fines and exile.⁴⁰

Two years later, representatives the community of Teremendo requested the same of the viceroy--to pay their governor for his services. They offered to provide him with twenty fanegas

³⁹ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 171-172.

⁴⁰ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 172.

of corn from the tribute surplus, plus one male and one female domestic servant. As before, viceroy Martín Enríquez agreed to the request. He established a wage of twenty-five cacao per day for each worker plus food. The workers were to be treated well, and the governor was not to request any more services, subject to the same penalty of fines and exile.⁴¹ These three cases suggest the extent to which indigenous officials had lost control of an important resource in their communities: their labor force. The viceroy's strict allocation and threats of severe punishment undermined one of the few privileges that was left to indigenous elites. Labor was now controlled by the central government of New Spain.

From Subject Towns to Cabeceras

In addition to regulating access to labor, at the expense of encomenderos and local indigenous authorities, the viceroy also weighed in on relations between cabeceras and sujetos. Subject towns were expected to provide services to the head towns, a relationship that might have been based to some degree and in some places on pre-Hispanic arrangements, but often was a result of postconquest reorganization. The disadvantages of being a sujeto in this system motivated many subject towns to attempt to regain their autonomy and thus their control over local resources, including labor. Such was the case with the community of Caurio, which in 1582 requested to suspend their labor service to their cabecera, Tlazazalca, for six months while they fixed their church. While this was not an uncommon petition, the fact that the viceroy had control over this type of relationship indicates the level of centralization that had been achieved by that time. Although the viceroy conceded to Caurio's petition, he pointed out that they were still responsible for fulfilling their repartimiento duties whenever required to provide labor.

⁴¹ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 173.

Furthermore, the viceroy emphasized that the community should not use this temporary suspension of service as an excuse to separate themselves from the cabecera. Caurio, it was expected, would continue to provide labor to the cabecera once the six months passed, as established by colonial legislation and local/regional practices.⁴²

A similar case occurred in Capula. One of its subject towns, Santa Ana, was not complying with its responsibilities to send workers. Capula argued that it was an established tradition (*costumbre*) for Santa Ana to provide labor service to them but recently, due to interference from religious authorities in the town, the residents of Santa Ana wanted to do away with the practice. The viceroy simply ordered that the tradition had to be respected, "...without making changes in any way by order of religious authorities nor any other person."⁴³ This ruling confirmed in clear terms that it was the viceroy and the central government who had the last word in determining the allocation of labor, along with other services and tribute responsibilities, and not local authorities either in the subject town or cabeceras, nor religious authorities or anyone else at the local level.

Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza initiated the transition of control over labor from local authorities to the central government in New Spain. This transition was reinforced and intensified under Viceroy Luis de Velasco and was firmly established by the reign of Viceroy Martín Enríquez. The transition meant that when Spanish residents in the region needed workers, they would bypass local authorities and appeal directly to the central government. Forms of forced labor developed, at first not fully conceptualized or legally formalized, yet clearly discernible. Eventually these practices evolved into the well-known *sistema de tandas*, or

⁴² Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 187.

⁴³ Paredes Martínez, *Y por mi visto...*, 199-200.

repartimiento system, which would be utilized throughout the colonial period in the Guanajuato-Michoacán region.

The Repartimiento System in the Guanajuato-Michoacán Region

By the beginning of the 1570s, the system known as repartimiento had been established in New Spain. Although initially designed for public works and agriculture, the Crown had approved its use for the mines by 1575.⁴⁴ The institution was quickly adopted in Guanajuato, where the discovery of silver generated a great demand for workers, one that was difficult to meet in a war-torn region. Without a secure labor source in the area, the Spaniards turned to their indigenous allies to satisfy the demand for workers. For Guanajuato, the Province of Michoacán provided the best option. A well-developed political system existed in this province, with well-established pre-Hispanic institutions, which could easily be modified to serve the new interests of the colonial system. It was within this context that workers from Tarascan communities began to go to the mines.

Tarascons were present in the Guanajuato mining center since the mid-sixteenth century. By 1560 they had established a hospital, in addition to a hospital for the Otomís and one for the “Mexicanos” (that is, Nahuas from central Mexico). However, the repartimiento was not fully implemented in this mining center until the end of the sixteenth century, when numerous complaints and petitions against the coerced labor practice were generated. While the repartimiento for the Guanajuato mines was established in 1579,⁴⁵ complaints and petitions

⁴⁴ Silvio Zavala, *El servicio personal de los indios en la Nueva España*, vol. 2 (Mexico City: Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Históricos, Colegio Nacional, 1984), 177.

⁴⁵ Felipe Castro Gutiérrez, “La resistencia indígena al repartimiento minero en Guanajuato y la introducción de la mita en Nueva España,” *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 11, no. 3 (2002): 231.

became persistent starting in 1590. The timing could be due to the fact that peace was finally achieved in the region in 1590, and a secure passageway to the mines was established. In any case, people from Comanja, Uruapan, Zacapo, and Zirosto, among other towns, were already going on tandas to the mines and were complaining about it to the viceroy. Thus, it is clear that by the end of the sixteenth century the repartimiento system was well established and that indigenous communities in Michoacán were being forced to participate in the system.

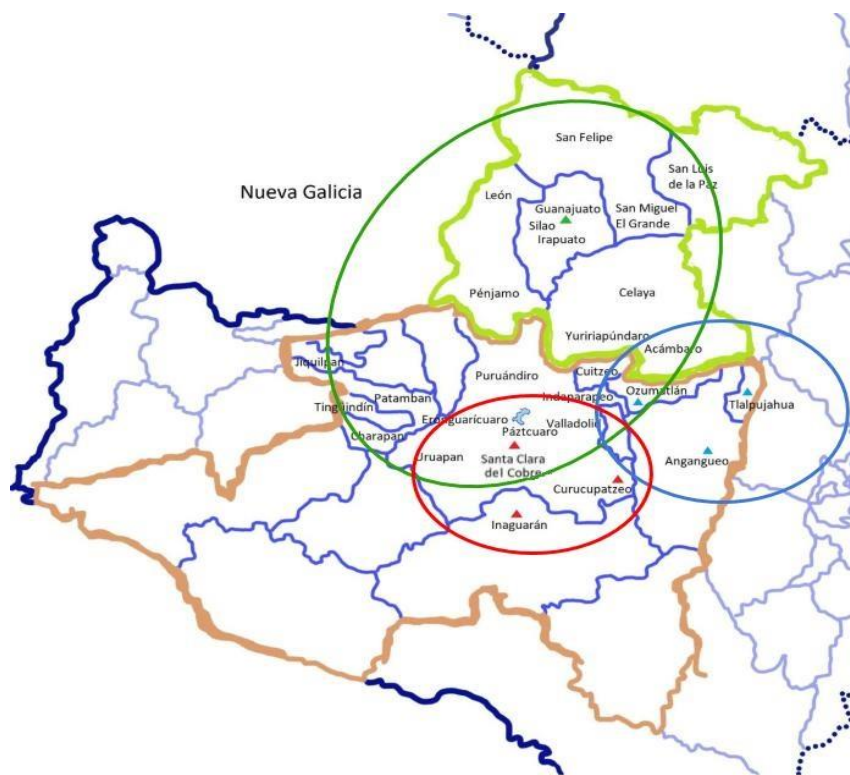
At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Spaniards began to debate whether to continue to use the repartimiento system. In New Spain, the debate continued until 1632, when officials finally decided to prohibit the practice, starting on the first day of 1633. However, enterprises such as mining and other works considered vital to the public good were excluded from the prohibition.⁴⁶ This prohibition has deceived many scholars into thinking that the repartimiento came to an end in the course of the seventeenth century, when in reality it continued to be used not only by the miners in Guanajuato, but also in other mining towns throughout New Spain, including Taxco, Tlalpujahuá, and Real del Monte.⁴⁷

Guanajuato was not alone in its attempt to recruit workers from Tarascan communities in Michoacán. Many groups sought to exploit the labor of these communities, including encomenderos, civil and religious Spanish authorities, indigenous elites, Spanish colonists, as well as town and city governments. In addition to supplying labor in some way to all these different groups, indigenous communities were also required to provide labor for the different

⁴⁶ Zavala, *El servicio personal de los indios*, vol. 5, pt. 1, 98.

⁴⁷ See Haskett, "Our Suffering with the Taxco Tribute"; Celia Islas Jiménez, *El Real de Tlalpujahuá: aspectos de la minería novohispana* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2008); Doris Ladd, *The Making of a Strike: Mexican Silver Workers' Struggle in Real del Monte, 1766-1775* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

mining operations in the region. Broadly speaking, there were three mining zones that directly impacted indigenous communities in Michoacán (see map 2.1). The first was the zone that comprised the Inguarán and the Curucupatzeo mining centers, along with the nearby refining town of Santa Clara de los Cobres. Their recruitment area included the immediate vicinity and the communities around Lake Pátzcuaro. The second zone comprised the Ozumatlán, Tlalpujahuá, and Angangueo mining centers. This recruitment area extended to Acámbaro (Guanajuato) to the north; Temascalcingo, Atacomulco, Jocotitlan, Ixtlahuaca and Jilotepec (all in the State of México) to the east; Tajimaroa (Michoacán) and Texcatitlán (State of México) to the south; and Cuitzeo and Zinapécuaro to the west.⁴⁸ The last mining zone was the Guanajuato



Map 2.1: The Mining Zones of the Guanajuato-Michoacán Region. Map by Mariza Serrano, based on Gerhard, *Guide*, 16, 344, Islas Jiménez, *El Real de Tlalpujahuá*, 169-170, and Castro Gutiérrez, “La Resistencia al repartimiento,” 233.

⁴⁸ Islas Jiménez, *El Real de Tlalpujahuá*, 169.

mining center. This was the farthest and largest in size, and thus one of the most important. Guanajuato's recruitment area was located in the Tarascan heartland, including the Lake Pátzcuaro region and the so-called *Sierra Tarasca* (Tarascan highland). It extended to Angamacutiro (Michoacán) and Yuririapúndaro (Guanajuato) in the north; Cuitzeo and Teremendo to the east; Uruapan and Peribán to the south; and Jiquilpan and Tarecuato to the west.⁴⁹

The zones expanded and contracted according to the growing and diminishing productive capacities of the mining centers, but for the most part persisted until the end of the colonial period. While the Inguarán-Curucupatzeo and Tlalpujahua-Ozumatlán zones both continued their mining operations throughout the colonial period, Guanajuato's sustained growth expanded the zone of recruitment in all directions so that by the end of the eighteenth century it had encroached on the other zones' recruitment areas.⁵⁰ This expansion of one zone led to a diminished labor force for other mining centers, which at times resulted in conflicts. For example, in the eighteenth century recruiters for the Inguarán and Curucupatzeo mines came into conflict over this valuable resource.

Tarascons in the Guanajuato Mines

It is clear that many Tarascan communities considered work in the mines as a highly undesirable activity, and their leaders often complained against being forced to perform repartimiento service in the Guanajuato mines. However, contrary to what may be expected, given the coercive nature of the institution, they rarely resorted to the use of violence in their

⁴⁹ Castro Gutiérrez, "La resistencia al repartimiento," 233.

⁵⁰ See Castro Gutiérrez, "La resistencia al repartimiento," 250.

demand to be excluded from this requirement. Rather, for most of the colonial period, Tarascan communities in Michoacán negotiated with colonial officials the specific conditions under which they would provide service to the Guanajuato mines. This framework provided a certain level of flexibility that made the imposition of a clearly exploitative institution, the repartimiento, at least somewhat more tolerable.

A good example of the negotiation that took place over the repartimiento system between indigenous communities and Spanish officials is the case of Uruapan. Uruapan is a community located in south-central Michoacán, approximately 67 leagues (195 miles) away from the Guanajuato mines. Throughout the colonial period this community negotiated its participation in the repartimiento system. Although many factors—including its distance from the mines—legally justified its exclusion from this requirement, Uruapan leaders still often acquiesced to the demands of colonial officials and utilized the law to mitigate the impact of repartimiento on its population. For example, in 1590 Uruapan leaders submitted a petition to the Viceroy don Luis de Velasco in which they requested that the repartimiento judge not ask for more workers than they are required to send by law to the Guanajuato mines. They argued that the judge's request for additional workers was causing the community great damage, and that many people were choosing to live in other places not affected by the labor draft, thus diminishing the number of tributaries. The viceroy ruled in favor of Uruapan and ordered the repartimiento judge to limit his request for workers to the number established by the former Viceroy, the Marquis de Villamanrique.⁵¹ It is unclear whether the order was fully enforced or not, but at least the

⁵¹ AGN, Ramo Indios, 1590, Vol. 4, Exp. 811, f. 221v.

petition and ruling points to a certain level of flexibility and accommodation by the colonial administration in dealing with indigenous demands.

Similar petitions were submitted by Uruapan some years later, in 1629 and again in 1640, as the population was rapidly declining due to epidemic diseases, and the censuses utilized to calculate the four percent required by law were not consistently updated, leading to inaccurate estimates. In addition, Uruapan also demanded that in the final estimate widows, single women, church singers and town officials be excluded as they were not eligible to serve in the mines.⁵² The response to this petition was again in favor of the Uruapan community; the Real Audiencia sent specific orders to the repartimiento judge to the effect that he limit the number of workers, that the required four percent should be based on the most recent census, and that the said individuals be excluded from that calculation. Furthermore, he instructed that a notification of the ruling should be made available to the people of Uruapan. Finally, if the harassment continued, the viceroy invited any literate person to notify the authorities, in case there was no *escribano publico real* (public royal notary) present in the community.⁵³

The examples above suggest how negotiation was not necessarily the ideal solution for communities like Uruapan, whose leaders most likely would have preferred a better arrangement, the best being exemption from the draft. But given the reality of the colonial situation, the legal system at least provided a certain level of protection against the most extreme forms of abuse, and offered the possibility of improving certain aspects of the system. Numerous examples from one community suggest how indigenous communities in Michoacán did not hesitate in using the legal system to check the system.

⁵² AGN, Ramo Indios, 1629, Vol 10, Exp 154, f. 85v.

⁵³ AGN, Ramo Indios, 1629, Vol 10, Exp 154, f. 85v.

If the petition to correct a particular abuse was the most common expression of resistance to the repartimiento system among communities in Michoacán in the colonial period, some communities petitioned to be excluded from the system altogether. For example, in 1688, the community of Chilchota, located in western Michoacán, presented a detailed petition requesting to be fully exempted from providing workers to the Guanajuato mines for several reasons. First, they correctly claimed that Chilchota was more than forty leagues (116 miles) away from the mines and this clearly exceeded the maximum range established by the law. In contrast with the leaders of Uruapan, leaders of Chilchota seized on this argument to be excluded. Secondly, Chilchota argued that the climate change from their community to the Guanajuato mines was so drastic that workers would return to their towns sick and disabled for days or months. The Chilchota community claimed that its workers often did not return at all because they died at the mines, where they were mistreated and exposed to many dangers. And if they did not die in the mines they returned sick from the *metales*, mercury poisoning, and *suma humedad* (high humidity), pulmonary diseases, and often died soon after returning. Consequently, their population was declining. They argued that forced labor in the mines contradicted the intent of royal legislation, which was designed to promote the “conservacion y aumento de los naturales” (conservation and increase of the natives).⁵⁴

The viceroys' response to the petition from Chilchota reveals the level of flexibility that the system allowed. Although the viceroy did not immediately order to stop the repartimiento in Chilchota, evidence suggests that he considered that possibility. First, he ordered an investigation into the actual distance from Chilchota to the mines and the inconvenience that the journey represented for workers. Second, and perhaps more suggestive of his intentions, he requested

⁵⁴ AGN, Ramo Indios, 1688, Vol. 30, Exp. 156, ff. 145r-146v.

information as to whether there were towns closer to the mines that could substitute for the Chilchota workers in the Guanajuato mines. Third, the viceroy was very clear in his instructions to the *alcalde mayor*. He ordered him to be very careful ("ponga mucho cuidado") with the way the *indios repartidos* (repartimiento workers) were treated and to make sure that they were properly paid in cash, not in kind, not only for the days of work but also for the days it took them to go back and forth from their community to the mines.⁵⁵ Additionally, he demanded that the judge in Chilchota prevent the person who was in charge of taking them to the mines to load them with food and other merchandise destined to be sold in the mines. Finally, he established that only four percent of the tributary population should be taken to the mines and that if this, or any of the other stipulations indicated in this document were disobeyed, those infringing the law would be fined 500 pesos.⁵⁶ The steep fine stipulated in the viceroy's decision speaks to the seriousness with which he treated the complaint. The system allowed for negotiation and accommodation rather than relying on outright imposition.

The process of negotiation and accommodation, evidenced in the cases of Uruapan and Chilchota, continued throughout much of the colonial period, almost always allowing a certain degree of flexibility within which representatives of indigenous communities could present concerns and grievances and expect some form of response and redress. However, in the second part of the eighteenth century major changes, brought about by the Bourbon Reforms, changed the rules of the game. Indigenous communities and other sectors of New Spain were universally affected by these changes and would respond to new impositions in various way--a topic explored in the next chapter.

⁵⁵ AGN, Ramo Indios, 1688, Vol. 30, Exp. 156, f. 146v.

⁵⁶ AGN, Ramo Indios, 1688, Vol. 30, Exp. 156, f. 146v.

The Repartimiento System and Migration

While communities in Michoacán were able to mitigate some of the most onerous aspects of the repartimiento by appealing to high-ranking Spanish authorities and royal legislation, the coerced labor institution was nonetheless a system of colonial exploitation. Workers who went on turns of service to the mines were not only performing some of the most dangerous and undesirable jobs in the mines—such as that of *tenateros* (ore carriers)—but they were also getting low wages for doing the work. We can see this in a 1590 petition from Uruapan to increase the salaries for its repartimiento workers. As mentioned above, Uruapan officials did not cite their distance to the mines, which clearly placed them outside of the repartimiento recruitment zone for the Guanajuato mines, as a legitimate complaint to exempt them from working in Guanajuato. Actually, all communities in Michoacán were beyond the distance limit from Guanajuato proscribed by law. But Uruapan's leaders did try at least to obtain better compensation for the labor that they provided. Uruapan's leaders asked for each worker to be paid six reales a week, rather than the two reales they were paid. They also requested to be paid in cash, not in kind, and to be paid through the local judge, not the repartimiento judge whom they could not trust. Furthermore, they requested to be paid for the days it took them to go to and from the mines, as the distance required them to travel for several days. At that time, workers from Uruapan resided at the mines for a month; it took them one week to go to the mines, and one week to return. Thus, they requested six weeks of pay, not four.⁵⁷

The response by Viceroy don Luis de Velasco to Uruapan's petition was positive. He ruled in favor of the community of Uruapan and ordered the alcalde mayor and the repartimiento

⁵⁷ AGN, Ramo Indios, 1590, Vol. 4, Exp. 812, f. 221v.

judge to make sure that their demands were met. He also requested an investigation to measure the distance to and from the mines so that the workers could be properly compensated for their travel expenses.⁵⁸ However, if this case shows that indigenous communities could negotiate their compensation for repartimiento services, and that in this case achieve an improvement, we must keep in mind that their earnings still remained quite low compared to the wages of free workers in the mines. While earnings differed from one mining center to another, according to Brading, skilled mine workers could earn four reales a day plus a share in the ore, or the so-called *partido*.⁵⁹ Bakewell suggests a similar scenario in Zacatecas. He describes how authorities there had to set a maximum wage of four reales a week, but some years later *barreteros* (pick men) were earning five to eight pesos per month (or about 2 reales a day) plus the *pepena* (as their share of the ore was called there).⁶⁰ Therefore, a repartimiento worker from Uruapan would still get paid only a half or as little as a fourth of what a skilled-wage worker from the mines would be paid, and most likely they were not sharing in the *partido* or *pepena*. Claude Morin aptly described the exploitation of repartimiento workers: “The resistance from indigenous workers to this form of ‘mita’ was as strong as the will of the mine owners to take advantage of this cheap labor force, so cheap that they would not even respect the wages.”⁶¹ The discrepancy between the two types of wages made it almost inevitable for some repartimiento workers to stay in the mines or to look for other work, rather than go back and be forced to return on another *tanda* for such low wages.

⁵⁸ AGN, Ramo Indios, 1590, Vol. 4, Exp. 812, f. 221v.

⁵⁹ Brading, *Miners and Merchants*, 147.

⁶⁰ Bakewell, *Silver Mining in Zacatecas*, 125.

⁶¹ Claude Morin, *Michoacán en la Nueva España del siglo XVIII: crecimiento y desigualdad en una economía colonial* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1979), 31.

Some men escaped being forced to risk their lives for the low wages of repartimiento service by moving to towns outside of the repartimiento recruitment zone. Morin states that “once they were done with their work, some indigenous workers from the south could get established in the rural haciendas, with the goal of becoming free of this forced labor to which they were subject by virtue of being residents of a town.” In fact, a consistent complaint from indigenous communities throughout New Spain was that the repartimiento was leading to depopulation. One example is the town of Cuitzeo, which in 1685 complained of having to provide workers to the Guanajuato mines, which were 30 leagues (87 miles) away. They provided testimony from four witnesses who testified that due to the repartimiento many of the workers would come back so sick that they would die, and others would leave the town and would go to the “Chichimecos” (the Valley of the Chichimecas, as the Bajío was known during the colonial period) to evade the service.⁶² Chilchota's leaders made a similar argument in 1688, discussed above, that service in the mines was making people sick and killing them, which led to depopulation. They also complained that many workers simply decided to leave the town in order to avoid the burden of the repartimiento.⁶³

Thus, the repartimiento labor draft drove some workers into Spanish haciendas, *estancias* (landholding devoted to livestock), and *labores* (farmlands), which were becoming more prevalent by the late colonial period. This process was, on the one hand, detrimental to indigenous communities because they lost households and tributaries; on the other hand, in a broader sense, this movement benefited the Spanish colonists in Guanajuato who needed access to labor and the repartimiento was providing it—whether by design or not. Miners benefited, as

⁶² AGN, Indios, 1685, Vol. 10, Exp. 203, ff. 170v-172.

⁶³ AGN, Indios, 1688, Vol. 30, Exp. 156, ff. 145r-146v.

well. They needed a reliable labor force and while the repartimiento provided cheap, low-skilled, temporary workers, they needed more permanent workers for the high-skilled positions. Some of the workers who abandoned their communities began to form *cuadrillas* (work crews, often residents in mine towns) around the mines that they would eventually call home.

Migration to the mines may not have been as spontaneous as is often assumed. It is true that the repartimiento was meant to be a temporary labor draft, but everyone involved—indigenous communities, colonial authorities, miners—must have realized the consequences of exposing so many men to the mining cities. In fact, rather than viewing the migratory aspect of repartimiento service as a negative factor, Guanajuato's miners at one point used it as a selling point of the system. In 1777, Guanajuato was in desperate need of workers and tried to use the repartimiento system to supply them. After many of the towns affected by this new repartimiento declined to provide the workers, the miners were quick to point out the benefits of the system: the communities could sell their goods in the city free of any taxes; and workers could remain to work in the mines after their turn of service was over, or they could return to their communities if they so desired.⁶⁴ In fact, miners saw two ways that the repartimiento system could be useful to them: first, it fulfilled their labor needs in the short run; second, it could lead to a long-term solution if the same repartimiento workers provided the stable, skilled labor force that they needed. They knew that some workers who would never come to the mines if not forced to do so, might actually prefer to stay and work freely at the mines, where they could earn more money instead of going back to their communities only to face future *tandas* and other burdens.

⁶⁴ AHMM, 1777, Exhorto, Caja 48, Exp. 15, ff. 35-35v.

The numbers tend to confirm the miners' hopes and expectations. In 1595 188 workers went to the Guanajuato mines through the repartimiento.⁶⁵ Most of these workers served on a weekly basis, but some, due to the distance, requested to serve longer periods. This was the case with the workers of Uruapan, who as early as 1590 were serving monthly tandas.⁶⁶ Acámbaro also requested in 1593 to have their turns of service to the Ozumatlán and Tlalpujahu mines extended to two weeks due to the difficulty of gathering workers from nearby estancias to fulfill their service to the mines. There may have been other towns with similar arrangements, but most seem to have gone on weekly turns of service. For an industry that could employ thousands of workers, 188 may not seem like a large number, but it did lead to considerable mobility. In a month, this figure meant that more than 700 different workers were going to the mines, and in six months—about the time it took to repeat workers—as many as 4,000 different workers from Michoacán would have visited the Guanajuato mines. Even if only a small fraction of those going to the mines stayed in the mines or surrounding communities, the number would represent a significant population movement in this period. And although the number of workers going to Guanajuato through the repartimiento declined over the years, it was nonetheless significant, especially if we consider that the institution lasted for two hundred years.

Layers of Labor Responsibilities

Clearly, indigenous communities were burdened with different types of labor responsibilities. At the individual level, a worker took responsibility for himself and his immediate family. The worker could fulfill that responsibility by working his land and engaging

⁶⁵ Castro Gutiérrez, “La resistencia al repartimiento,” 235.

⁶⁶ AGN, Ramo Indios, 1590, Vol. 4, Exp. 812, ff. 221v.

in local level commerce. At the town level, a worker was responsible to help meet the town's needs. This included maintaining local churches and providing services to indigenous authorities. At the regional level, one was responsible to provide service to the cabecera or provincial capital. For instance, people from Erógaricuaro and Zirándaro were required to provide service to their cabecera, Pátzcuaro, but in 1552 they were also being asked to send workers to the provincial capital, Guayangareo-Valladolid.⁶⁷ In addition to these labor responsibilities, indigenous communities also provided labor for private enterprises, both voluntarily and by force. In the early colonial period, encomenderos relied on forced labor for their enterprises, or rented out their access to labor to other Spaniards. The encomienda was replaced eventually by the repartimiento. The end result for indigenous communities was very similar. Even free wage labor could take a toll on indigenous communities, when workers would often leave for prolonged periods of time, sometimes for good.

The historical record abounds with examples of how indigenous communities at the end of the sixteenth century were subject to multiple demands for labor. One such example comes from Acámbaro. The community was assessed with a total of 1,557 tributaries, including workers in Spanish labores and estancias, as well as many men working as *cantores* (singers), alguaciles, sacristans, and other positions in local churches. This included 153 in Acámbaro, 37 in Guasindeo (Salvatierra), 34 in Celaya, and 50 in San Bartolomé. They also claimed that some of the tributaries were Chichimeca Indians, which excluded them from personal service. For that reason, they argued that their labor responsibilities through the repartimiento to the Tlalpujahua

⁶⁷ Paredes Martínez, “*Y por mi visto ...*,” 110.

and Ozumatlán mines should be based only on a total of 1,000 tributaries. The viceroy agreed to exclude those serving in churches, but not the others.⁶⁸

Another example of the multiple labor responsibilities that communities faced comes from the town of Zirosto. In 1590 this town was obligated to provide a total of 123 workers on a weekly basis. Of these workers, 12 served in the Guanajuato mines, 60 in Valladolid, 36 in the copper mines (possibly Inguarán), and 15 for the city of Zamora. These demands represent a great burden on the community, far surpassing the four percent that they were required to give. Based on the last census, the town had a total of 1,668 tributaries, which made them responsible to provide only 66 workers, according to the law. The viceroy agreed with their petition and ordered that from then on, they were only responsible to provide 66 workers.⁶⁹ In a later petition, it was established that of the 66 workers they would send 40 to Valladolid, 16 to the copper mines, and 10 to Guanajuato.⁷⁰ However, this case confirms that communities were heavily burdened with different levels of labor responsibilities both at the local and regional level. While in this case the number of repartimiento workers required was significantly reduced, they were still responsible to serve in two different mining centers. One of them Guanajuato, was more than 70 leagues away, a tremendous distance in this period, especially for people who did not own horses.

Uruapan provides another example of the many responsibilities and also how different mining centers in the region competed for indigenous labor. In 1640, some Uruapan workers living in the nearby San Gregorio town were forced by the *alcaldes* from that town and the

⁶⁸ AGN, Indios, 1592, Vol. 6, Pte. 2, Exp. 366, f. 82.

⁶⁹ AGN, Indios, 1590, Vol. 4, Exp. 258, f. 78v.

⁷⁰ AGN, Indios, 1590, Vol. 4, Exp. 308, f. 102v.

repartimiento judges of Santa Clara to go to the copper mines in their jurisdiction in order to fulfill their *tanda*. The officials from Uruapan argued that the workers were actually registered as residents of their town and were thus subject to repartimiento service to the Guanajuato mines--not the Santa Clara mines. The viceroy ruled in their favor and ordered that as long as the workers were registered as residents of Uruapan, they should not be compelled to go to the copper mines.⁷¹ In this case, the workers from Uruapan had a choice; they could either continue going to the nearby copper mines, or they could go to the Guanajuato silver mines, which were much further away. The fact that they (or their principales?) argued to be exempted from the copper mines in order to go to the Guanajuato mines is a bit perplexing. Santa Clara del Cobre was only 15 leagues away, whereas Guanajuato was about 70 leagues away. Many factors might explain this choice. As mentioned above, people in Guanajuato were able to sell goods free of taxes.⁷² While the long trail to the mines was certainly tiresome, it could nonetheless be used by Tarascan merchants as an opportunity to sell their goods, using the repartimiento workers as porters. This fact and other benefits may have been a deciding factor in the Uruapan workers' decision to choose service in the more distant silver mines than in the nearby copper mines, although it is impossible to deduce their motivations with any certainty.

Complying With the Repartimiento

Complying with the repartimiento was not an easy task. Many communities faced some level of resistance from workers, others from indigenous principales, and others from Spanish colonists. In some places, competition over labor with nearby Spanish landed estates represented

⁷¹ AGN, Indios, 1640, Vol. 13, Exp. 37, f. 37v.

⁷² AHMM, 1777, Exhorto, Caja 48, Exp. 15, ff. 35-35v.

a serious obstacle. While the mining industry was in fact a very important economic activity for New Spain, it depended on landed estates to supply them with the necessary foodstuffs, both for people and animals. Thus, communities located in important agricultural regions faced a tough labor market. Such was the case of the communities located in the Bajío region, places such as Acámbaro and Yuririapúndaro.

For example, in 1591 Acámbaro had difficulty fulfilling its repartimiento responsibilities due to the fact that many of its tributaries were working in nearby estancias. After trying to recruit workers from those estancias, the indigenous officials of the town found that the Spanish owners defended the workers and were thus unable to withdraw them. This scenario placed the indigenous principales of Acámbaro in a difficult situation. They were responsible for complying with the demands of viceregal authorities—one of which was to fulfill their labor services—but they did not have any power over Spanish colonists who employed their workers. While the viceroy ruled that the workers were in fact responsible to provide the required service and that they should be compelled to do so, he put the responsibility back on the principales, who would be required to find substitutes if they were not able to get enough workers to comply.⁷³ Acámbaro's officials had gone to the viceroy to address a problem concerning Spanish colonists employing workers and protecting them from fulfilling their labor responsibilities, but in the end, the responsibility had been thrown back at them, leaving them exactly where they started. The viceroy's order contained no possibility of appeal or any sort of punishment for Spanish colonists who employed townspeople, so it is very unlikely that Acámbaro's principales were able to resolve their problem. Since their petition achieved little, Acámbaro's principales then requested to extend the turns of service from one to two weeks. They argued that the distance from

⁷³ AGN, Indios, 1593, Vol. 6, Pte. 2, Exp. 323, f. 72.

Acámbaro to the estancias, and from the estancias to the mines, made it impractical for them to go on a weekly basis. This demand had caused complaints from the workers, who refused to provide the required service. While this proposed solution did not solve the principales' problem completely, it did give them more time to assemble workers from nearby estancias when their turn to serve came due.

In a similar manner, Yuririapúndaro's principales found themselves in a difficult situation. They were required to provide workers for the Guanajuato mines, but many of their workers were employed on nearby haciendas. The principales argued that the fact that their workers were employed there made them ineligible to provide personal service, and requested that they should therefore be left alone. However, they stated that if they were not granted their request, then they asked for two things. First, that the *juez repartidor* (repartimiento judge) should exclude from his list people who were not subject to provide service—such as officials, church servants, and widows. Second, they needed help from local Spanish authorities to release the workers from the haciendas, since they could not force the workers to serve when they were under the protection of the hacienda owners.⁷⁴ The viceroy's response completely ignored the principales' appeal to help them extract workers from nearby haciendas, as he did not even mention this issue in his ruling, but he did grant them the request to exclude from the final count those individuals who by law were not supposed to be included in the repartimiento list.⁷⁵ This case highlights the difficulty of enforcing the repartimiento in a place where competition for labor involved powerful Spanish colonists who could circumvent the law, with little or no

⁷⁴ AGN, Indios, 1631, Vol. 10, Exp. 67, f. 221v.

⁷⁵ AGN, Indios, 1631, Vol. 10, Exp. 68, f. 222.

punishment. While viceregal authorities had the legal authority to enforce the law, they often were unable, or unwilling, to do so.

However, sometimes viceregal authorities did take action against recalcitrant Spanish authorities who did not follow orders. This was the case in the town of Yuririapúndaro and two other towns, Charo and Jiquilpan. In 1686 the viceroy sent an order requesting the *alcaldes mayores* of Salvatierra and Charo, along with the *corregidor* of Jiquilpan, to provide all necessary assistance to ensure that towns in their jurisdiction fulfilled their service responsibilities to the Guanajuato mines. He affirmed that this was necessary since these towns had not provided the workers requested of them that year. He set a fine of 200 pesos and a threat that he would file charges on their *residencias* if they did not comply.⁷⁶ However, after six months, it appears as if the *alcaldes mayores* and *corregidor* had completely ignored the order and had not done what the viceroy had requested. Guanajuato's *alcalde mayor* complained a second time to the viceroy, stating that if the viceroy's orders were not followed then his authority was essentially meaningless. Furthermore, he argued that production in the Guanajuato mines would be severely impacted if *repartimiento* workers ceased to go, claiming that production had significantly increased—citing a production of 29,468 pesos in less than three months—thanks in part to the careful management of the labor force obtained through *repartimiento*. Without the *repartimiento*, he claimed, production was in danger of collapsing from a lack of workers. The *alcalde mayor* of Guanajuato thereby appealed to the viceroy to apply the 200 pesos fine stipulated by his previous order.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ AGN, Indios, 1687, Vol. 30, Exp. 61, ff. 50v-51.

⁷⁷ AGN, Indios, 1687, Vol. 30, Exp. 61, ff. 50v.-51.

Just three days after receiving the above-mentioned complaint by Guanajuato's alcalde mayor, the viceroy responded with a swift and decisive order. He granted full authority to Guanajuato's alcalde mayor, or another nearby official, to collect the 200 pesos fine from don Diego de Esquivel y Castañeda, Jiquilpan's alcalde mayor, and don Antonio Ramírez, Charo's Corregidor. In Yuririapúndaro's case, the viceroy awaited a determination of which official was responsible for the oversight: either don Francisco de Salazar Varona, who had received the original notification and had said that he was willing to comply with the order, or don Francisco de Palma, who, in the meantime, had succeeded Salazar as Salvatierra's alcalde mayor. Once this investigation was made, he would issue the fine.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the viceroy set a steep 1,000 pesos fine if his orders were disobeyed in any way by any of the parties involved.⁷⁹

This case shows that the viceroy was willing and able to take action, if necessary. However, both Spanish colonists and local officials seem to have defied the viceroy's authority whenever it went against their interests. The repartimiento, as seen in the case of Acámbaro and Yuririapúndaro, could undermine the interests of estancia and hacienda owners, who were willing to defy viceregal orders in order to retain their workers. Local Spanish officials were also willing to defy viceregal authority, since often their interests were intrinsically tied with those of the communities and colonists that they served. Thus, they would often simply follow the old Spanish proverb: "obedescio pero no cumplo" (I obey but do not comply).

⁷⁸ AGN, Indios, 1687, Vol. 30, Exp. 61, ff. 51v-52.

⁷⁹ AGN, Indios, 1687, Vol. 30, Exp. 61, f. 52v.

Conclusion

The mining industry in the Guanajuato-Michoacán region placed many pressures on indigenous communities to provide labor for the mines. While encomenderos were initially in charge of the labor force, they eventually ceded this authority to viceregal authorities who, beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, took control of this valuable resource. This process occurred over time, documented in decrees that were designed to send a clear message: that the viceroy and by extension the crown was now in charge of regulating the labor force.

Encomenderos, local Spanish authorities, Spanish colonists, and indigenous principales were forced to comply with the viceroy's attempt to consolidate royal authority. The attempt to regulate all these groups was not always successful, however, as some ignored or subverted viceregal orders. Colonial authorities sometimes took drastic measures to punish offenders, but rarely were Spaniards punished for open disobedience. In many cases, indigenous communities suffered the consequences, since they were required to meet the demands of multiple different groups with their limited labor force above and beyond their required quotas.

At the same time, the system involved a certain level of negotiation and accommodation, which indigenous communities often used to mitigate some of the worst aspects of the system. In the eighteenth century, some very important changes took place. Namely, the Bourbon Reforms changed the relationship between indigenous communities and the viceregal government. The officials became more authoritative and less willing to accommodate the needs of indigenous communities. The repartimiento made a brief but consequential resurgence that galvanized indigenous communities throughout Michoacán. The following chapter examines some of these late colonial developments in the mining industry of Guanajuato, including debt peonage.

CHAPTER 3

A Competitive Labor Market, 1700-1770

The eighteenth century was a turbulent period in New Spain. War and dynastic change in Spain marked the beginning of the century. The Bourbon kings instituted several administrative and economic reforms in Spanish America that began to have a significant impact by the second half of the century. At the turn of the century, however, social and economic relationships in the mines were much the same as in the preceding two centuries. Miners in Michoacán and Guanajuato continued to utilize the repartimiento system and defended their privilege to use it, even if only in a limited way. Labor in this dynamic economic region remained in high demand as mining centers competed with numerous haciendas, trapiches and ingenios. Whereas Guanajuato was by far the largest mining center, numerous smaller but important centers dotted the landscape in Michoacan, as well, in Tlalpujahuá, Ozumatlán, Angangueo, Curucupatzeo, and Inguarán. Competition among these centers for access to labor had a significant impact on workers. While it is true that repartimiento forced labor had declined by the eighteenth century, another coerced labor institution—debt peonage—emerged in this period, with dire consequences for the workers.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, the Bourbon Reforms were implemented fully and their impact was widespread. These measures significantly altered the relationship between indigenous groups, Spanish colonists, viceregal authorities, and the Spanish Crown. In particular, new economic impositions—such as new taxes—along with newly-created institutions—such as the militias—would exacerbate already tense social relations between different sectors of New Spain's society. As in times past, the different groups attempted to reach a certain level of accommodation through negotiation, but the new order of business dictated a

different approach. Social tensions would eventually erupt into open conflicts. While confrontations had occurred before in New Spain and elsewhere in Spanish America,⁸⁰ the number and intensity of conflicts and the repressive strategies adopted by colonial authorities became especially acute after mid-century. These changes had a direct impact on the labor market in the Guanajuato-Michoacán region, where expanding silver and copper mining industries were greatly affected by the social instability.

The Persistence of the Repartimiento

Most interpretations of the repartimiento labor draft for the silver mines in New Spain suggest that at some point during the seventeenth or early eighteenth century the repartimiento, once useful to recruit workers, was mostly irrelevant because free wage labor was by then abundant in the mining districts, and it made more sense for miners to contract wage laborers than to go to the trouble of forcibly recruiting indigenous workers to the mines. In fact, most interpretations emphasize that free wage labor was the norm throughout the colonial period and that forced labor was an anomaly; that as soon as a better alternative was available, forced labor ceased to be relevant.

Brading suggests that there was a great deal of opposition to the repartimiento not so much from indigenous communities but from *alcaldes mayores*, *hacendados* (hacienda owners), and parish priests who argued that “their Indians” were better suited for agricultural work than for work in the mines.⁸¹ Furthermore, he claims that “even where such Indians were recruited

⁸⁰ For a broad analysis of the role of rebellion in colonial New Spain, see, for instance, William B. Taylor, *Drinking, Homicide, and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979); and for a case study of Michoacán, see Felipe Castro Gutiérrez, “Lo tienen ya de uso y costumbre. Los motines de indios en Michoacán colonial,” *Tzintzun. Revista de Estudios Históricos* 38 (2003): 9–34.

⁸¹ Brading, *Merchants and Miners*, 146.

they served as little more than auxiliary workers” and that “within the Mexican mining industry at large the role of drafted Indian labour dwindled to insignificant proportions during the course of the eighteenth century.”⁸²

Brading’s assessment is, broadly speaking, correct. Repartimiento labor did in fact diminish significantly as the colonial period progressed. The greatest number of workers recruited, based on the available records, was in 1579, with 487 workers, and in 1657, with 467 workers. These years seem anomalous, since for most other years the number varied between 130 and 260, an average of 180 workers; initially the workers served on a weekly rotational basis, but eventually they worked a monthly or a six-week service period.⁸³ This would mean that more than 4,000 different workers visited the mines in any given year.⁸⁴ By 1770, when the miners tried to reintroduce the system—as we will see in chapter five—the number of workers going to the mines had in fact “dwindled” to only 30 workers on a monthly rotational basis.⁸⁵ However, this did not mean that the institution itself had ceased to be important for the miners. The fact that miners defended the system tooth and nail for the duration of the colonial period suggests its continued importance from their point of view.

The continued importance of the repartimiento system for miners is clearly visible in a dispute of 1719 between the alcalde mayor of Guanajuato—representing the miners’ interests—and the community of Zacapu—supported by the alcalde mayor of the Province of Michoacán

⁸² Brading, *Merchants and Miners*, 146.

⁸³ Castro Gutiérrez, *La resistencia al repartimiento*, 237.

⁸⁴ Castro Gutiérrez, *La resistencia al repartimiento*, 231. It is important to point out, as Castro Gutiérrez explains, that the number of workers requested and the actual number of workers that showed up could differ significantly.

⁸⁵ Castro Gutiérrez, *La resistencia al repartimiento*, 237.

and local clergymen. The dispute began in May of that year when Nicolás Hernández de García, Zacapu's governor, submitted a petition to the viceroy asking for his town to be exempted from providing service to the Guanajuato mines. He explained that his community only had a total of forty-seven tributaries, but since they had been assessed their service duties many years before, when their numbers were higher, they had had to provide many more workers than the established four-percent. Based on the number of tributaries that they had, Zacapu would have only been responsible for providing between one and two workers, but they were sending six or seven on a monthly basis.⁸⁶ Hernández explained that they had tolerated it up to that point only because they had had to deal with more pressing matters; but since they were surrounded by water, they were in desperate need to rebuild a causeway that had deteriorated, leaving them disconnected from the mainland. He was thus asking the viceroy to suspend their repartimiento responsibilities at least until they could finish the causeway.⁸⁷

Viceroy Baltasar de Zúñiga y Guzmán immediately agreed that the number of tributaries should be reduced to the correct amount, based on an accurate, updated count of the population. On relieving them of the responsibility to provide workers for the mines, he requested a sworn testimony by the alcalde mayor of Michoacán confirming what the community of Zacapu had claimed.⁸⁸ Don Juan Gerónimo de Tolosa, Michoacán's alcalde mayor, was in Mexico City on a work-related trip; he discussed the situation with the viceroy and confirmed Zacapu's claims. First, he verified the number of tributaries that they had submitted. Second, he provided personal

⁸⁶ AGN, Minería, 1719, Vol. 134, f. 2. This file does not have file or page numbers. It is at the end of volume 134. The page numbers are my own, only for reference purposes, and follow the order of the unnumbered pages.

⁸⁷ AGN, Minería, 1719, Vol. 134, f. 2v.

⁸⁸ AGN, Minería, 1719, Vol. 134, ff. 2-2v.

testimony that the town was in the middle of a lake, completely surrounded by water, and in desperate need to rebuild a causeway that would allow them to enter and exit the town.

Furthermore, Tolosa argued that if they were in fact able to rebuild the causeway, it would lead to improved trade for the community since Zacapu was located in a favorable place, with plenty of water and fish.⁸⁹ Faced with the facts, the viceroy agreed to suspend Zacapu's labor responsibilities (now lowered to one or two workers) to the Guanajuato mines until they could successfully complete the repair of the causeway.⁹⁰

Don Alejandro Claramonte, Guanajuato's *alcalde mayor*, was disappointed when he found out about the resolution. He heard from Clemente de Sierra—the *conductor personero* assigned by Claramonte to take the repartimiento workers to Guanajuato—that Michoacán's *alcalde mayor* had personally communicated to him that Zacapu had been relieved from that responsibility and therefore asked the personero to let them stay in their town. Also, the town's priest had claimed that he had a decree exempting the workers from going to the mines so that they could work in the church and help rebuild the causeway. Claramonte was very unhappy with this situation and exclaimed:

This novelty goes against the inveterate tradition and superior decrees that this city [Guanajuato] and mining center has for the repartimiento of said Indians. It is not only detrimental to the interests of your majesty and of the instructions given by the superior government of New Spain, but also of the common and public cause.⁹¹

Claramonte demanded that a decree of 1717—confirming his authority to enforce the repartimiento in Michoacán—be respected and applied. In the meantime, he requested that even

⁸⁹ AGN, Minería, 1719, Vol. 134, f. 4v.

⁹⁰ AGN, Minería, 1719, Vol. 134, f. 4v.

⁹¹ AGN, Minería, 1719, Vol. 134, f. 6v.

if Tolosa had a decree from the viceroy that it be suspended until the situation could be resolved. Thus, he asked that neither Michoacán's alcalde mayor, nor the governors or clergymen, obstruct in any way Sierra's task of assembling the workers. Claramonte stated that instead of obstructing Sierra's work, they should all be helping and treating him well.⁹² The strong reaction from Guanajuato's alcalde mayor clearly indicates the significance that he, and the miners he represented, gave the repartimiento.

However, Tolosa held fast and refused to send the workers, showing Claramonte the decree he had obtained from the viceroy. Claramonte then exclaimed that he would take the case directly to the viceroy. He did so in October of that year, writing a strongly worded and passionate appeal to the viceroy. Claramonte stated that, due to the importance of the mines to the Crown and the public good, it was not advisable to proceed with the order to relieve Zacapu of their labor responsibilities to the mines. He argued that if they did so, the mining operations in Guanajuato would be in danger of falling behind due to a lack of workers, given the fact that repartimiento workers were so necessary to the operation of the mines.⁹³ Furthermore, he claimed that if the town of Zacapu was relieved of their repartimiento responsibilities, other towns would follow their example and attempt to exempt themselves using similar arguments. Given the importance of the case, Claramonte asked for the support of the mining deputies of Guanajuato, don Juan de Sopena and don Francisco de Busto, so that they could go without delay ("sin dilatación") to advocate for this urgent matter.⁹⁴

⁹² AGN, Minería, 1719, Vol. 134, f. 7.

⁹³ AGN, Minería, 1719, Vol. 134, f. 11. The text reads: "Dijo que por las graves y perjudiciales consecuencias que pueden resultar al Real Interés y bien público de que se atrase el corriente de las haciendas de minas de este Real y que se hace evidente con la falta de operarios, siendo como son tan precisos los indios de la tanda que se reparten a dichas haciendas..."

⁹⁴ AGN, Minería, 1719, Vol. 134, f. 11.

The reaction of the *fiscal* reveals a certain degree of surprise at the tone of Claramonte's denunciation. In a very simple, straightforward way, the fiscal stated that the relief given to Zacapu was only temporary, while they rebuilt their church and the causeway, and that it was feasible that one of the projects (probably the church) was already completed while the other (probably the causeway) should take no more than a year. He recommended, and the viceroy accepted the recommendation, to ask Michoacán's alcalde mayor to look into the case to determine how far from completion the projects had come. Based on the information obtained from Tolosa they would make a determination.⁹⁵

The Zacapu case clearly demonstrates the importance of the repartimiento system to Guanajuato's miners, even as late as 1719. The number of workers going from Zacapu to Guanajuato was only six or seven workers, and viceroy Zúñiga had lowered it even more, to just one or two, and yet Guanajuato's alcalde mayor strongly insisted that they should not be allowed to stop sending workers to the mines, even for the brief time that it would take them to fix their church and causeway. While the small number of workers actually serving in the mines through the repartimiento supports Brading's claim that the system eventually "dwindled to insignificant proportions," the reaction by the miners whenever the institution was threatened exposes a different reality, a different motivation to maintain the system. The evolution of the Guanajuato mining center in the second half of the eighteenth century, competition for labor in the region, and changes brought about by the Bourbon Reforms all played a role in determining the fate of the repartimiento system at the end of the colonial period.

⁹⁵ AGN, Minería, 1719, Vol. 134, f. 12.

The Labor Market

As discussed in chapter three, the Guanajuato-Michoacán region included very productive mining centers that constantly competed for laborers, who were coming mainly from the Province of Michoacán, but also from nearby *alcaldías mayores* and *corregimientos*. In the area of the present-day state of Michoacán, an important mining industry that existed since the pre-Hispanic period continued to operate throughout the colonial period. The two main metals extracted were silver and copper. Spaniards paid more attention to the silver mines because silver was a more valued commodity, leaving for many years the production of copper in the hands of indigenous communities. However, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and especially during the eighteenth century, when copper became more important for the weapons industry, the Crown became more directly involved in the production of this metal. I will examine two of Michoacán's most important mining centers—Tlalpujahuá and Inguarán—their labor demands, and the type of labor institutions that they used to recruit workers.

Tlalpujahuá

Tlalpujahuá was the most productive silver mining center in Michoacán throughout the colonial period, with an output that was consistent, if not always very impressive.⁹⁶ Tlalpujahuá is located in the northeast part of Michoacán, close to the borders of the modern states of Michoacán and Mexico. Tlalpujahuá is often considered one of the mining centers in a region that came to be called the “Provincia de la Plata,” which also included the important mining centers of Temascaltepec, Zultepec, Zacualpan, and Taxco. These were some of the earliest

⁹⁶ Thomas Hillerkuss aptly described Tlalpujahuá's production as “not spectacular but without interruption.” “Las minas de la Nueva España en los mapas del Siglo XVI. ¿Un secreto del Estado?,” *Apuntes* 26, no. 1 (2013): 13.

mines to be discovered and worked in New Spain. In the 1520s, Spaniards began mining operations in the Provincia de la Plata, and by 1532 most of its mining centers were in fully operative.⁹⁷ As some of the earliest active mining centers in New Spain, they provided much of the incentive for the continued search for more precious metals to the west and north.

The presence of precious metals in Tlalpujahua was already known in the pre-Hispanic period. Mining operations in the region predated the arrival of the Spaniards, most likely at the surface level.⁹⁸ According to Pablo de Beaumont, by 1539 there was some mining activity in this center, but only on a small scale.⁹⁹ It was not until 1558 that the biggest silver deposits in Tlalpujahua were discovered. After that year, the mining operations there began to expand along with its population. The “real y minas” of Tlalpujahua was founded in that same year.¹⁰⁰ Given its continued growth, Tlalpujahua soon became a head town and by 1565 the *alcaldía mayor* of Tlalpujahua was established.¹⁰¹

As the mining operations in Tlalpujahua increased, so did the need for workers. Mining operations throughout New Spain often suffered from a shortage of workers. In some places, such as Zacatecas and Guanajuato, the great distance between the mines and population centers made it difficult to recruit the necessary workers. However, Tlalpujahua was located in a well-populated area, so that towns close to the mining center were able to provide workers and other

⁹⁷ Jaime García Mendoza, “La formación de grupos de poder en la Provincia de la Plata en el siglo XVI,” (PhD dissertation, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2002), 33.

⁹⁸ Islas Jiménez, *El real de Tlalpujahua*, 28-29.

⁹⁹ Gavira Márquez, *Minería y población*, 60.

¹⁰⁰ Islas Jiménez, *El real de Tlalpujahua*, 16.

¹⁰¹ María Concepción Gavira Márquez, *Minería y población en Michoacán durante el siglo XVIII* (Morelia: Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Facultad de Historia, 2009), 60.

necessary agricultural products and materials necessary to work the mines. There were four towns in the vicinity of Tlalpujahua that supplied workers and products to the mining center: Tlacotepec, Tlalpujahuilla, Los Remedios, and Santa María. Also, after the first bonanza of 1558, the two cuadrilla settlements of San Lorenzo and San Francisco were founded. These towns and settlements were primarily populated by Mazahuas.¹⁰² Soon, Spanish colonists settled in the vicinity as well, establishing haciendas and ranchos that supplied the mines. This led to the creation of what Islas Jiménez referred to as a “complejo minero” (mining complex), with Tlalpujahua as its center.¹⁰³

As was to be expected, the relationship between established indigenous towns and the Spanish colonists could be very problematic. As the mining operations expanded and mine owners became wealthier, they attempted to monopolize the region’s other important industries: agriculture and livestock raising. In this way, haciendas soon flourished in and around Tlalpujahua. As in Guanajuato and other mining centers, miners and hacendados were often one and the same person, or belonged to the same families and/or elite groups. As the haciendas expanded and acquired more, hacendados inevitably came into to conflict with indigenous communities of the region. Many miners became involved in protracted legal struggles against indigenous communities over land ownership disputes.¹⁰⁴

As in other parts of Michoacán, workers from indigenous towns around Tlalpujahua engaged in the mining industry to supplement their income, and to meet tribute payment and other community obligations. However, since the supply was not enough to satisfy demand—

¹⁰² Islas Jiménez, *El real de Tlalpujahua*, 80.

¹⁰³ Islas Jiménez, *El real de Tlalpujahua*, 86.

¹⁰⁴ Islas Jiménez, *El real de Tlalpujahua*, 124-127.

often because of bad working conditions and the mistreatment of workers in the mines—miners resorted to the repartimiento forced labor draft. The use of this mechanism is documented in Tlalpujahua from the end of the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries.¹⁰⁵ As in other places, repartimiento labor caused dynamic population movements that connected indigenous communities to the mining center. While some workers remained in Tlalpujahua or nearby communities, most continued to have links to their communities of origin and paid their tribute and other obligations in their communities.¹⁰⁶

While Tlalpujahua did not have the same economic value as Guanajuato, it did have a consistent production throughout the colonial period and eventually developed its own “zone of influence” from which it could recruit repartimiento workers. Tlalpujahua’s zone included the towns of Zinapécuaro, Taimeo, Maravatío, Ucareo, Tajimaroa, and Acámbaro. This zone of influence changed over time and often overlapped with that of Guanajuato and other nearby mining centers. For example, Acámbaro was required to provide repartimiento workers to the Tlalpujahua and Otzumatlán mines in the late sixteenth century, but by 1630 they were providing workers to the Guanajuato mines.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Indaparapeo's leaders were asked to provide workers to the Guanajuato mines but claimed to be busy working in the Otzumatlán mines, a fact was confirmed by the town’s indigenous authorities and Spanish witnesses.¹⁰⁸ Some of these changes could be explained by the growing influence of Guanajuato in the eighteenth century and the control that it began to exert over the area of the present-day state of Guanajuato, an area

¹⁰⁵ Islas Jiménez, *El real de Tlalpujahua*, 152.

¹⁰⁶ Islas Jiménez, *El real de Tlalpujahua*, 164.

¹⁰⁷ AGN, Indios, 1592, Vol. 6, Pte. 2, Exp. 366, f. 82; AGN, Indios, 1593, Vol. 6, Pte. 2, Exp. 323, f. 72; AGN, Indios, 1630, Vol. 10, Exp. 259, f. 148.

¹⁰⁸ ANG, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 183-192.

that the Guanajuato miners eventually saw as part of their extended zone of influence and ardently defended from outside encroachment.

Besides the repartimiento system, miners also relied on debt peonage in Tlalpujahua to satisfy the industry's labor demands. Free wage labor was broadly used in Tlalpujahua and certainly constituted a large part of the labor force, but it was often complemented by forced wage labor systems, and at times one could be confused for the other. For instance, Islas Jiménez points out that while the Crown emphasized the importance of using free wage labor, mine owners were more concerned with retaining a cheap, specialized, and permanent labor force and would often employ debt to retain their workers. Specifically, they advanced money, food, and clothing to indebt their workers and keep them tied to a particular mine and/or processing hacienda. Islas Jiménez states that “As a result, this led to a level of exploitation comparable to the encomienda and the forced repartimiento.”¹⁰⁹

Whereas the repartimiento system slowly began to fade away by the mid-eighteenth century, debt peonage increased in Tlalpujahua. According to Islas Jiménez, the proportion of workers forcibly retained by debt reached unprecedented proportions in the eighteenth century.¹¹⁰ There were a couple of advantages that this forced labor institution had over the repartimiento. First, it constituted a permanent cheap labor force, whereas repartimiento was temporary. Secondly, it included specialized workers—such as *barreteros* and *barrenadores*—whereas the repartimiento only included non-specialized workers who could engage only in very general tasks. Thus, although technically free wage labor, the mine owners could exercise a certain level of compulsion, in the form of debt, to control the labor force. Although this practice was

¹⁰⁹ Islas Jiménez, *El real de Tlalpujahua*, 182.

¹¹⁰ Islas Jiménez, *El real de Tlalpujahua*, 183.

certainly a problem in the silver mining industry, other industries, with a lower margin of profit, could see even more egregious cases of exploitation and uses of debt peonage, as we will see with the case of the copper mines of Inguarán.

Inguarán's Copper Mines

The production of silver and gold has received much attention in the historiography of the colonial mining industry. It is no surprise, since those two metals fueled the conquest and colonization of the Americas, feeding the imagination of endless conquistadores and adventurers seeking wealth and fame in the New World. However, other important metals have received much less attention. María Concepción Gavira Márquez states that “Metals like copper, tin, and iron have been forgotten by the historiography, especially for the colonial period. Just like the conquistadores and colonizers, we historians have let ourselves be blinded by the brightness of silver and gold, and we have not sufficiently considered the significance of these metals called less noble and their relevance for the eighteenth century.”¹¹¹

One metal that was particularly important for the colonial economy was copper. While the copper mining industry was not as glamorous or as profitable as that of silver mining, it was

¹¹¹ María Concepción Gavira Márquez, “Tecnología para fundir y refinar el cobre en Michoacán (Nueva España): la fábrica de Santa Clara del Cobre a fines del siglo XVIII,” *Cuadernos de Historia* 31 (2009): 8. However, it is important to highlight that due to its significance in the silver mining industry and its well-known impact on workers' health, mercury is another metal that has received a good amount of attention in the historiography of the colonial mining industry. See, for instance, Carlos Contreras, *La ciudad del mercurio. Huancavelica 1570-1700* (Lima, Perú: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1982); Kendall W. Brown, “Workers' Health and Colonial Mercury Mining at Huancavelica, Perú,” *The Americas* Vol. 57, 4 (2001): 467-496; Jerome O. Nriagu, “Mercury Pollution from the Past Mining of Gold and Silver in the Americas,” *The Science of the Total Environment* 149 (1994): 167-181; Isabel M. Povea Moreno, “Mano de obra libre en la minería del mercurio y la plata, siglo XVIII: el caso de Huancavelica, Potosí y Zacatecas,” in *América en la memoria: conmemoraciones y reencuentros*, ed. Begoña Cava Mesa (Bilbao: Gobierno Vasco, Universidad de Deusto, and Asociación Española de Americanistas, 2013), 383-396; and Nicholas A. Robins, *Mercury, Mining, and Empire: The Human and Ecological Cost of Colonial Silver Mining in the Andes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

nonetheless an important industry for New Spain and the Spanish Crown. It was known for its practical applications, for the production of tools, coins, and armaments. It was also an important ingredient in processing silver ore.¹¹² In spite of its practical applications, the production of copper did not generate the profits that the miners or the Crown expected, leading to inconsistent levels of production. Elinore Barrett claims that no copper miner was known to have become rich because of his involvement in this industry, nor was the copper mining industry itself an important source of tax revenue for the Crown.¹¹³ Nonetheless, the Crown offered various incentives to secure investors in the most important copper mines in New Spain.

In New Spain, the main source of copper was the Province of Michoacán.¹¹⁴ Copper was extracted in many parts of Michoacán, such as Apupato, Churumuco, Oropeo, and Sanchiqueo. But the main supply of copper came from the Inguarán mining center. Tarascans worked the mines of Inguarán in the pre-Hispanic period, and they remained in the hands of indigenous owners in the early colonial period. Indigenous workers continued to rely on pre-Hispanic techniques to extract and process the metal.¹¹⁵ The technology changed little over the course of the colonial period. This fact was due, according to Gavira Márquez, to a lack of interest by the Crown or other Spanish colonists to invest in this industry since copper was considered, at least from an economic perspective, as a “second-class metal.” However, the Crown was not completely uninterested in the copper mining industry. While the king Crown did not take direct control of the copper mining industry, he did name an *asentista* (contractor) to buy the copper

¹¹² Elinore M. Barrett, *The Mexican Colonial Copper Industry* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 1.

¹¹³ Barrett, *The Mexican Colonial Copper Industry*, vii.

¹¹⁴ Barrett, *The Mexican Colonial Copper Industry*, 4.

¹¹⁵ Gavira Márquez, “La fábrica de Santa Clara del Cobre,” 13.

from indigenous people who produced it and, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, took possession of the most productive mine in Inguarán called San Bartolomé. Initially, administrators managed the mines but eventually the mines were rented to *arrendatarios* (leaseholders) who would pay the crown a fee for the right to work them. As Gavira Márquez points out, all the *arrendatarios* who controlled the San Bartolomé mine were part of Pátzcuaro's local elite, members of its city council. This fact is significant for how the copper mines' labor force was recruited (see table 3.1).¹¹⁶

Table 3.1: Arrendatarios of the San Bartolomé Mine

Arrendatarios	Years
Francisco de Murga	1708-1716
Martín Ansorena	1716-1725
Diego de Yturria	1736-1740
Gerónimo de Zuluaga	1740-1769
Sebastián Ugarte	1769-1794

Source: Gavira Márquez, "La fábrica de Santa Clara del Cobre," 16.

One consistent problem faced by the *arrendatarios* in making their mining operations successful was the same problem that other miners confronted--a shortage of labor. The *arrendatarios* thought that their lease of the San Bartolomé mine included access to the labor market in and around the mines. However, indigenous communities often complained of being mistreated by the miners and refused to go to the mines. They complained of having the double burden of serving in other mining centers—such as Guanajuato, Ozumatlán, and Tlalpujahua—as well as the Inguarán mines.¹¹⁷ Intense competition over labor in the Guanajuato-Michoacán

¹¹⁶ Gavira Márquez, "La fábrica de Santa Clara del Cobre," 14-16.

¹¹⁷ Gavira Márquez, "La fábrica de Santa Clara del Cobre," 15.

region provided workers opportunities to find better employment in other mines or nearby haciendas that could offer better wages and working conditions. For that reason, copper miners had to devise ways to recruit and retain an often-reluctant labor force.

Recruiting and Retaining the Labor Force

During the entire colonial period, many different labor systems in the Spanish colonies attempted, on the one hand, to control labor and, on the other, to protect workers from abuses. As subjects of the king, indigenous workers were free to move around, but this movement was limited in many cases by colonial legislation and the practices of employers who sought more direct control over the labor force. Recruiting and retaining a reliable labor force in the mining centers of the Spanish colonies represented a real challenge, since work in the mines was hard, dangerous, and often badly paid. Also, the mining centers were usually located in distant and inhospitable areas. In response to these realities, colonial authorities devised labor systems that would motivate or force workers to go to mining centers.

One of those systems was the repartimiento. Although this system benefited many miners, not all miners had access to this resource, nor did it satisfy all the miners' needs, as we have seen in the case of Tlalpujahua. Mining centers that were not very productive could often not count on the support of viceregal authorities to impose this system of forced labor on indigenous communities. Furthermore, by the end of the colonial period the repartimiento was used in a very limited way in the Guanajuato-Michoacán region, so that indigenous communities resisted attempts to re-impose the institution, as we will see in chapter five.

Such was the situation of the Inguarán mining center in the eighteenth century. With its small or middling level of production, miners could not count on viceregal support to impose and

enforce the repartimiento in the Province of Michoacán. One example of this scenario can be found in a legal case from Pátzcuaro. In 1752, Pátzcuaro's *regidor* (municipal councilman) and *sargento mayor* (sergeant major), Gerónimo Zuloaga, possessed a lease for the San Bartolomé mine in Inguarán and wanted to impose a *tanda* of one worker per community located in the vicinity of the mining center—mainly those around Lake Pátzcuaro. These communities complained to the viceroy, the conde de Revillagigedo, who denied Zuloaga's petition and provided the communities with a decree prohibiting this practice.¹¹⁸ Thus, while places such as Guanajuato and Tlalpujahua continued to rely on the repartimiento to satisfy—at least partially—their labor demands, this privilege was denied to Inguarán's miners.

Also, at that very same time, Inguarán's miners had to compete for labor with other mining centers of the region, especially the huge mining center of Guanajuato to the north, where production increased considerably after the middle of the eighteenth century. For this reason, the miners in Michoacán had to resort to other means to attract and retain their labor force. One option was to pay their workers more than competing industries in the region paid. However, copper miners often complained—and possibly with good reason—that their operations generated limited profits and they could not afford to compete with more profitable enterprises. Thus, copper miners resorted to the use of debt to attract and retain the labor force they needed, a strategy that led to tensions and conflicts between workers and mine owners.

¹¹⁸ AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 148, ff. 7v-8.

Debt Peonage in Historical Context

The use of debt to limit the free movement of workers was a strategy utilized by employers very early in the colonial period. Evidence exists for its practice since the end of the sixteenth century, although it was not until the prohibition of repartimiento service for agriculture in 1632 that the practice became more systematic. Silvio Zavala claims that to recruit workers, employers before and after 1632, “generally used an advance in kind and money on the day’s wage or the pay of the tributes and bonuses, which they charged to the indigenous workers. The worker saw in this way their freedom of movement diminished by his debt.”¹¹⁹

The extent to which debt was used effectively to retain workers depended on economic, demographic, and geographic factors. Historians have examined the use of coercion to recruit and retain a labor force especially in haciendas and mines. Peter J. Bakewell mentions that the retention of workers was a constant problem for the Zacatecas miners, many of whom resorted to “stealing” workers from other mines offering them advance money, a practice that viceregal authorities tried to control through constant changes in colonial legislation.¹²⁰ Laws did not completely solve the problem of retaining workers, however, and therefore many miners resorted to the use of debt to limit their movement. According to Bakewell, this system was first seen in Zacatecas at the end of the sixteenth century, and was subject to constant attempts by authorities to limit some of the abuses to which it led. However, he clarifies that not all the miners used this mechanism, and that in most cases workers did not owe any money to the miners. Rather, Bakewell argues that workers often stayed for the material benefits of belonging to a cuadrilla,

¹¹⁹ Silvio Zavala “Orígenes coloniales del peonaje en México,” *El Trimestre Económico* 10, no. 40(4) (1944): 728.

¹²⁰ Peter J. Bakewell, *Silver Mining in Zacatecas*, 125-126.

and the monetary reward that they obtained through the *pepena*, considered by many to be even more important than actual salaries.¹²¹

To counter some of the abuses experienced by workers in this system of debt peonage, viceregal authorities established legislation that attempted, on the one hand, to protect the workers, but on the other to protect the employer's investment of advancing money to the workers. A law of 1589 set the maximum amount that could be advanced to workers at one peso. Later, at the end of the sixteenth century, a maximum of wages for three months of work was established as the limit. In 1606, the limit was set at six gold pesos, requiring the advanced money to be registered with authorities.¹²²

In 1619, the practice of advancing money to indigenous workers was completely forbidden; if money was given, workers were not legally obligated to pay it back, the law stipulated. One way to circumvent this law was to pay the tribute owed by indigenous workers and to consider this payment an advance, a sum that would then have to be paid off through work. In 1629, a limit of four months was again established, but by the end of that year it was changed to the previous arrangement that any advance money given to indigenous workers did not have to be paid back. This vacillation on the part of colonial authorities led to several confrontations between workers and employers. In 1632, the prohibition of the practice of advancing money for work was reissued and made more explicit: also prohibiting advances made in the form of tribute payments. By 1641, advances in the form of tribute payments were again allowed, but they could either be paid with money or work that did not exceed four months. In that same year, the use of

¹²¹ Peter J. Bakewell, *Silver Mining in Zacatecas*, 126.

¹²² Silvio Zavala "Orígenes coloniales del peonaje," 729.

“justified” debts was again allowed, which the worker had to pay before leaving the workplace.¹²³

In 1643, royal legislation established that the accounts of escaped workers would have to be made before authorities to ensure that abuses were not committed. The law also allowed for workers to pay their debt in money, if they so desired; if they wanted to pay with work, it could not exceed four months, after which time the worker would not be obligated to stay, regardless of the amount of the debt. However, by this time the practice of adding other items and services to the debt—such as clothing, food, and medical treatments—was widespread, and many workers complained of having to accept goods and services that they did not want or need, thereby extending their length of service. As Zavala points out, although many workers did use the court system to address abuses, many more could simply not afford to do so, either because they did not possess the resources to do it or because their employers prevented them from doing so.¹²⁴ This inability on the part of workers to use the courts was due in part to legislation that limited authorities from visiting haciendas and other work places. Without this authority, workers were left unprotected as long as they remained on the haciendas or in the mining camps. To defend their rights, many had to resort to extreme measures, such as escaping and/or resisting, which many were unwilling or unable to do.

¹²³ Zavala, “Orígenes coloniales del peonaje,” 732.

¹²⁴ Zavala, “Orígenes coloniales del peonaje,” 734.



Map 3.1: The Mining Centers of Inguarán and Curucupatzeo, and the Refining Center of Santa Clara del Cobre. Map by Mariza Serrano, based on Gerhard, *Guide*, 16, 344.

Indebted Workers in the Inguarán Mines

A lengthy dispute in Michoacán from 1758 to 1763 offers an outstanding example of indebted mine workers. The dispute involves a competition for workers between miners in the centers of Inguarán and Curucupatzeo, who openly debated the use of debt to retain workers (see map 3.1). The case began when don Andrés Antonio de Castro and don Gerónimo de Zuloaga, along with other owners of the Inguarán copper mines, presented a complaint against the owners of other mining centers who protected workers who had run away from their mines. They claimed that in 1758 and again in 1759 they submitted petitions to the court; in response, a royal decree was issued on January 11, 1760, ordering local authorities to ensure that miners from one mining center did not induce workers from other mining centers to go to their mines, and

that as long as there was no just cause for workers to leave a mine, that they should be compelled to return and work to pay their debts.¹²⁵

The legislation had little effect, however, in that workers continued to run away from Inguarán. The Inguarán miners blamed don José de Malavear, the owner of the silver mines of Curucupatzeo. They claimed that more than twenty workers had escaped to Malavear's mines and when local authorities tried to retrieve those workers Malavear's workers started a riot to prevent it.¹²⁶ Don Juan del Castillo, administrator of Malavear's mines, along with don José de Salazar, Curucupatzeo's *teniente de alcalde mayor* (provisional lieutenant), launched an investigation by interviewing some of the workers from the copper mines. The workers confessed to owing money to the Inguarán miners, but did not know how much; they all refused to return to the copper mines, where they suffered horrible working conditions and abuses at the hands of the owners and mine administrators.¹²⁷

The Inguarán miners argued that the workers who had run away possessed no justification for doing so, and that their testimonies about mistreatment were lies. They also claimed that Malavear was using this excuse to secure the workers for his mines by helping them to avoid paying what they legally owed the miners.¹²⁸ Malavear's next move annoyed the Inguarán miners even more. He asked Salazar to go to the Inguarán mines and find out how much money the workers owed the miners. He asked that in the interim the workers should not

¹²⁵ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 1, ff. 10v-12.

¹²⁶ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 1, ff. 12v-13.

¹²⁷ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 1, ff. 13v-14.

¹²⁸ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 1, ff. 14v-15.

be forced to go back to the copper mines, but rather would be allowed to stay in his mines to continue working, and that he would deduct money from their salaries to satisfy their debts.¹²⁹

The Inguarán miners complained that Salazar was not a reliable authority to carry out the investigation, given that he was Malvear's relative and protégé. Nonetheless, he proceeded to do it and took with him two workers that the Inguarán miners considered ringleaders in the riot, well-known agitators. They claimed that, as Salazar carried out his investigation, the two workers began to incite other workers in the copper mines, who were told that those that had escaped had had their debts forgiven. Meanwhile, Salazar asked the owners and administrators of the copper mines to produce the account books so that he could pay off the debts of the escaped workers and also any workers still in the copper mines who may also want to leave.¹³⁰ This tactic encouraged many workers to leave their jobs, forcing the copper mines to cease operations due to a lack of workers. The Inguarán miners blamed Malavear and Salazar for this outcome, complaining that "there is not one of these people [the workers], regardless of how docile he may be, who would not be happy to not have to pay what he owes."¹³¹

The Inguarán miners then argued that the damage to their mines and their other businesses was severe. They had spent great sums of money recruiting these workers and now that they were no longer working their investments were in danger of being lost. They also argued that although some of the advances given to the workers had been in kind, not in cash, they were given at reasonable prices, without any type of pressure or coercion. They claimed that this made sense since the miners were also merchants, and they could provide the same products

¹²⁹ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 1, ff. 15v-17.

¹³⁰ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 1, ff. 17v-19.

¹³¹ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 1, ff. 19v.

that the workers would have purchased elsewhere for the same price.¹³² The mine owners argued that if Salazar was allowed to continue his investigation and incitement of the workers, not only would the miners suffer, but also the merchants of the region who depended on the mining industry. Furthermore, they claimed that the Spanish crown would lose important revenue from mining operations and that the entire kingdom would suffer from a lack of copper, which, although not as valuable as silver, was nonetheless just as important.¹³³

In their petition, the miners did not ask for the investigation to stop, but rather for someone other than Salazar to perform it. They suggested that one of Pátzcuaro's *alcaldes ordinarios* (municipal magistrates) should carry out the investigation, a person who apparently had no connection to the mining industry. They said that the new person in charge of the investigation would settle the accounts of the escaped workers and, possibly, the accounts of others in the mines who requested the same, but not of all those who were content with their jobs and who did not specifically ask for it. However, they reasoned that even if the workers settled their accounts, this did not mean that they could leave their jobs. Rather, they would be free to leave once an order from the court specifically entitled them to do so.¹³⁴ The judge in charge of the case agreed to the miners' petition and ordered the investigation to continue, but this time with one of Pátzcuaro's *alcalde ordinarios* accompanying Salazar, and threatening a fine of four-hundred pesos if the investigation was not carried out as specified.¹³⁵

¹³² AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 1, ff. 20-20v.

¹³³ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 1, ff. 21.

¹³⁴ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 1, ff. 21v-23v.

¹³⁵ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 1, ff. 24v-25.

In the new investigation carried out by Salazar and José Justo de Meñaca, Pátzcuaro's alcalde ordinario assigned to the case, they requested a list from the Inguarán miners with the name of the escaped workers and the amount of money that they owed. However, the list submitted by the miners (see table 3.2) only included the names of the workers and the mines to which they belonged, not their debts. The list has a total of thirty-eight individuals, one of whom, Ignacio Villareal, was already in Pátzcuaro's jail until he could settle his account, while the others, they claimed, were in Malavear's mines.¹³⁶ Inguarán's miners then requested that for them to be able to settle the account with the workers, it was necessary for them to be present, and therefore should be brought back to their respective mines, something which Justo instructed Salazar to do.¹³⁷

However, not surprisingly, Salazar did not comply with the order and after three months he had not yet taken the workers back to Inguarán. The miners complained that the workers went in and out of Pátzcuaro and Valladolid freely, boasting loudly that they did not owe anybody anything, knowing that they were protected by Malavear's administrator and Salazar. Furthermore, the miners argued that some of the workers had in the meantime gone to places even further away than Curucupatzeo, making it even more difficult for the miners to find the workers. They asked the court to replace Salazar with a more reliable official and to continue the investigation.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 1, f. 26v.

¹³⁷ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 1, ff. 29.

¹³⁸ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 1, ff. 30-30v.

Table 3.2: Inguarán Mines and Indebted Workers, 1763

Mina de San Miguel y los Dolores Coronel don Andrés Antonio Castro		Mina de Santa Teresa Don Sebastián de Ugarte	
	Antonio Ávila		Manuel Villareal
	Francisco García		Joseph Villareal
	Santiago Clemente		Joseph Villareal's son
	Francisco Mallorquín		Agustín Hurtado
	Xavier Feliciano Sacarías		Agustín de Alcaraz
			Damasco Antonio
Mina del Chocolate Don Luis Tomás de Urrutia		Mina de San Aparicio Regidor don Joseph Antonio de Bengoechea	
	Cristóbal Ruiz		Cayetano de la Cruz
	Cristóbal Ruiz's son		Pedro Gutiérrez
	Basilico Baca		Ignacio Ruiz
	Joseph Manuel Ramírez		Juan Ignacio Monforte
	Isidoro Chaves		Miguel Gerónimo
	Mariano Vicente		Juan Lázaro
	Asensio Medrano		Antonio Lázaro
	Gerónimo Cano		Mateo Lázaro
	Joseph Cristóbal López		
	Juan Manuel Malla	Mina de don Nicolás Mariz de Aguilera	
	Vicente Santos		Francisco Andrada
	Gerónimo Bocanegra		Tomás Leal
	Juan de Dios Robles		Ignacio Villareal ^a
	Salvador Pérez		
	Luciano Origel		
	Joseph Antonio Martínez		

Source: AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 1, f. 26-26v.

a. Ignacio Villareal was held in Pátzcuaro's jail until his account could be settled.

A "fair and equitable solution"

Malavear's response to Inguarán's miners was a strong, articulate, and well-reasoned argument in defense of the workers. He first established that, in fact, the workers had caused damage to his mines that were going to be expensive to repair, but he did not blame the workers who rioted, but rather the functionary who had gone to retrieve the workers and had proceeded in

a careless and reckless manner, inciting the workers' anger and violent reaction. He explained that around five-hundred people had participated in the riot—including women—but he specified that no injuries had occurred, nor any other major damage. He explained that a group of “rustic men” tried to defend their co-workers in the only way they knew. He also clarified that there were no ringleaders, nor any instigators; rather, it was a spontaneous riot and for this reason he asked for leniency.¹³⁹ However, he warned that the damage caused so far would be nothing compared to what might happen if a “fair and equitable solution” was not reached.¹⁴⁰ Malavear argued that if workers felt exploited by the miners, they may decide to run away and hide, and this would lead to the abandonment of his mines, leading to the loss of an “exorbitant amount of pesos.”¹⁴¹

Malavear next described his mines and the relationship with his workers. He claimed that he had invested more than 250,000 pesos in the work and rehabilitation of the Curucupatzeo mines over the past five years (since 1757). He also stated that he had never paid his workers in kind, only in cash (reales) on a weekly basis. He also claimed that he had built a church and two chapels, and that he founded the Nuestra Señora del Rosario cofradía. Furthermore, in order to facilitate the transportation of food and make the place habitable, he had built a road of fifteen leagues in the rough mountainous area leading to Curucupatzeo, using gunpowder to cut through the tough rock.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 4, ff. 552v-553.

¹⁴⁰ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 4, ff. 536v-537.

¹⁴¹ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 4, ff. 537v.

¹⁴² AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 4, 537v-538v.

Having established his achievements and investments, Malvear then argued that a fair and equitable solution was needed and justified for the workers who had participated in the riot in his mines. He cited the fact that workers in other mining centers, such as Guanajuato, had often been involved in disturbances and that only the most necessary actions had been taken to control the situation and prevent further damage. Thus, Malvear sought leniency for his workers and a negotiated settlement for their actions.¹⁴³

Malvear then moved on to discuss the situation of the escaped workers. He argued that the copper miners treated the workers cruelly, speaking in general terms: their hair was cut as a punishment, they were put in jail for minor offenses, and they were often beaten.¹⁴⁴ Although this case does not provide specific examples of wrongdoing, another case in 1757 presented evidence of abuse. Don Andrés de Castro, owner of one of the mines in the lawsuit, was implicated in this case, involving a worker from a charcoal hacienda, Manuel Salvador de la Cruz, who got drunk on a holiday and failed to report the next day for work. Miguel Ruiz de Gaona, the hacienda's administrator, went to De la Cruz's house, where he punched him, pulled his hair, and later gave him sixty lashes. De la Cruz's son, Manuel Juan de Dios, reported the incident to authorities. He claimed that his father had been mistreated, and that he was also sent to work in the copper mines as a punishment for his indiscipline. Manuel simply asked that his father be brought in front of the *alcalde mayor* to determine whether he deserves to be punished or to be set free.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 4, 540.

¹⁴⁴ AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 4, 540v.

¹⁴⁵ AHMP, 1757, Caja 43, Exp. 2, ff. 255-255v.

In his declaration before the *alcalde mayor*, the hacienda's administrator, Miguel Ruiz de Gaona, testified to the mining center's reliance on coercion. When asked why he did not bring Manuel Salvador de la Cruz with him as instructed, he replied that he could not because he was working in the mine and that they would have to ask the owner to let him out. When asked about the events, Ruiz admitted to having gone to De la Cruz's house, beaten him and taken him to the hacienda, where don Andrés de Castro was waiting for them. Once there, Castro instructed Ruiz to cut De la Cruz' hair (to make *balcarrotas*, a type of haircut, which may have been used to restrain De la Cruz by causing him pain, and also possibly to humiliate him)¹⁴⁶ and to give him lashes in the buttocks. Then he was sent to work in the mines. This punishment, he argued, was common in the region's haciendas in order to subdue the unruly workers. Otherwise, there would be chaos. He recalled the case of another administrator who, if he had not hidden, would have been killed by workers during a riot. For that reason, the miners had decided to send recalcitrant and rebellious workers into the mines, as a type of confinement.¹⁴⁷

Finally, a few days later, Manuel de la Cruz was brought in front of the *alcalde mayor* to testify. Although he was described as being fluent in the Spanish language, an interpreter, don Nicolás Nambo, was brought along with him to provide his testimony. De la Cruz testified that the punishment of sending him to the mines was justified and, although his son Manuel was right to present a petition, he did not want to proceed with the case "for the great love that he has for his master."¹⁴⁸ De la Cruz was willing to withdraw the charges if he were allowed to go back to

¹⁴⁶ *Balcarrotas* is defined as "Locks of hair that the Indians let hang on both sides of the face, having the rest of their heads shaved." Joaquín García Icazbalceta, *Vocabulario de Mexicanismos: comprobado con ejemplos y comparado con los de otros países hispano-americanos* (Mexico City: Tip. y Lit. "La Europea", 1899), 42.

¹⁴⁷ AHMP, 1757, Caja 43, Exp. 2, ff. 257-257v.

¹⁴⁸ AHMP, 1757, Caja 43, Exp. 2, ff. 258-258v. "...por el amor mucho que a su amo le tiene..."

the charcoal hacienda. Don Andrés Antonio de Castro responded a couple of days later. He answered by saying that he forgave De la Cruz's offenses and was ready to take him back to his job as a charcoal maker, where he would treat him well and would pay him a wage, as he had done before. He also claimed that he would not let this incident lead to any animosity on his part, and would rather treat him and his son as he would treat his own sons.¹⁴⁹

Returning to the case from Pátzcuaro, in addition to accusing the miners of physical abuses, Malavear also accused them of financial abuse. He described how the miners would keep the workers' accounts with secrecy, refusing to show them to the workers or anybody else who requested it. Also, he claimed that the miners insisted on paying the workers with overpriced goods.¹⁵⁰ This practice had led to very high debts, which the workers could not possibly afford to pay back with their low incomes. This, Malavear claimed, "was no other thing than perpetual slavery," since the debts instead of diminishing, were daily increasing.¹⁵¹ Finally, he stated eloquently "and because it is fair that the workers pay back their debts, so is it that the unjust bonds of slavery tied around liberty be broken."¹⁵²

The practice of using debt in the Inguarán mines to restrict the workers' movements was not new. There is additional evidence of this practice eleven years earlier, involving many of the same people. In 1752, workers from don Andrés Antonio Castro's mine, San Miguel de los Dolores, and from don Geronimó de Zuloaga's mine, San Bartolomé, had escaped their mines

¹⁴⁹ AHMP, 1757, Caja 43, Exp. 2, ff. 258v-259.

¹⁵⁰ AHMP, 1757, Caja 43, Exp. 4, ff. 541-542. According to Pedro Joseph Gutiérrez, one of the escaped workers, the price for one almud of corn was 2 reales, one panocha was 1 real, and one piece of bread was 1 real as well.

¹⁵¹ AHMP, 1757, Caja 43, Exp. 4, ff. 556.

¹⁵² AHMP, 1757, Caja 43, Exp. 4, ff. 556-556v. "...y porque así como es justo que paguen los operarios lo que deben, lo es también el que se rompan esos injustos lazos, que se arman sobre la libertad."

and gone to Malavear's mines in Curucupatzeo. The owners accused Malavear's administrator at the time, don Thomas Albean y Collado, of protecting the workers and they demanded that the workers be returned to them. Among those at the silver mines was one named Diego de Espino, who, according to the miners, owed them a total of eighty-four pesos and one real, a very large sum for a worker.¹⁵³ Following this incident, there was an attempt to overtake the Curucupatzeo mines by force, an effort very likely orchestrated by the copper miners, but the invasion was repelled by the workers themselves.¹⁵⁴

Also, in the same year of 1752, the copper miners lodged another complaint about escaped workers, but in this case to the mines of don Francisco de Uroveo. The complaint involved six workers belonging to the mines of don José Román: Tadeo Pedraza and his brother, owing 84 pesos, another one owing 43 pesos, and three owing 10 pesos each, for a total of 157 pesos. Uroveo was willing to pay the workers' debts but Román rejected the offer. However, by order of Viceroy Conde de Revillagigedo, Román was forced to accept the money. At the last minute Román attempted to add other expenses, either to stall or stop the transaction, or simply to get more money out of the deal. For example, he wanted to add 8 pesos for the cook, 4 pesos for the blacksmith, 1 peso and 4 reales for the worker's tribute, and 4 reales that he claimed to have given the workers on their arrival to the mines. All of this money, as often happened, was not fully accountable and the new charges were rejected by the authorities. In the end, don José Román accepted the amount of 157 pesos that he had initially claimed the workers owed him.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ AHMP, 1752, Caja 40, Exp. 7, ff. 499-501.

¹⁵⁴ AHMP, 1752, Caja 40, Exp. 8, f. 540.

¹⁵⁵ AHMP, 1752, Caja 41, Exp. 1, ff. 65-73v.

Thus, the the Inguarán miners had a long history of using debt to retain their workers. In the case of the Curucupatzeo mines, Malavear suggested several ways to correct the situation. He argued that, as a first step, the amount of time that a worker could be held back by his debt should not exceed one year—as expressed in law thirteen, title thirteen, book six of the *Recopilación de Leyes*.¹⁵⁶ In other words, he simply requested the existing law to be applied. Furthermore, he exhorted the copper miners to pay the workers a fair wage, in cash, not in kind, as he claimed that he and all other silver miners did (although, as discussed above, that was not always the case). He cited the example of the *barreteros* in his mines who earned 4 reales per day, plus the *partido*, which could amount to as much as 3 or 4 pesos every day.¹⁵⁷ Malavear argued that if Inguarán miners followed his advice, they would not need to indebt their workers in order to force them to stay in their mines, but rather the workers would stay of their own free will and many more would come, without succumbing to the temptation of going to his mines for better wages.¹⁵⁸

Finally, in response to the claim by Inguarán miners of the importance of their mines to the royal treasury, Malavear simply pointed out that his mines, being silver mines, were in fact more profitable and contributed more to the royal treasury, and therefore were worthier of attention and promotion. Thus, Malavear stated that in view of everything he had said, the authorities should send a dispatch clearing all charges so that his workers could return to the mines and continue their work.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ AHMP, 1757, Caja 43, Exp. 2, f. 558.

¹⁵⁷ AHMP, 1757, Caja 43, Exp. 2, f. 542v-543v.

¹⁵⁸ AHMP, 1757, Caja 43, Exp. 2, f. 544.

¹⁵⁹ AHMP, 1757, Caja 43, Exp. 2, f. 545v-546.

The Viceroy's Response

The response by the Viceroy Marqués de Cruillas was clear, direct, and categorical. He first stated that since he did not want to harm so many people that had participated in the riot, he therefore pardoned them of all offenses that they may have committed. He then appointed the *teniente* of Curucupatzeo, don José de Salazar, to go to the copper mines and to make the owners or administrators show him the account books. Thereupon, in the presence of the workers, or a person appointed by them, the accounts should be settled. He instructed Salazar that if it were true that the workers had been payed with overpriced goods, that the accounts should be adjusted to their real value, and the debts lowered or the workers reimbursed, if necessary. Furthermore, the viceroy instructed that if workers, after adjusting the accounts, still owed money to the miners, that they would still be free to work anywhere they wanted, notifying the paymaster of the new workplace to deduct a reasonable amount from their pay and to give the deducted money to the miners on a weekly or monthly basis. Finally, the viceroy stated that the workers' new bosses would be notified that they had to be treated well and paid in cash (reales), not in kind.¹⁶⁰

The viceroy's response was not good news for the Inguarán miners. Not only did they not get the ruling that they expected, but the hated *teniente* Salazar was given full authority to carry out the viceroy's orders. By late 1762 and early 1763, Salazar set out to execute the orders. He first notified the involved parties, which included a total of seven miners (see table 3.3). Since the owners were not at the mines when the order was given, the administrators in charge were the ones who answered the *teniente's* questions. All of those who responded dodged his request to look at the account books. For example, the administrator of the Santa Teresa mine,

¹⁶⁰ AHMP, 1757, Caja 43, Exp. 2, f. 560-563v.

don José Álvarez, said that their account books were in possession of the mine owner, don Sebastián de Ugarte, who was in Pátzcuaro. Similarly, the administrator of the San Bartolomé mine, don Francisco Núñez, said that he did not have the books on hand and that, moreover, the order did not apply to his mine.¹⁶¹

Table 3.3: Mines, Owners/Arrendatarios, and Administrators of the Inguarán Mines

Owner/Arrendatario	Mine	Administrator
Don Sebastián de Ugarte	Santa Teresa	Don Joseph Álvarez
Don Gerónimo Zuloaga	San Bartolomé	Don Francisco Núñez
Don Andrés Antonio de Castro	San Miguel de los Dolores	
Don Joseph de Bengoechea	San Aparicio	
Don Juan Tomás Urrutia	La Cañada de Chocolate	
Don Manuel Román	La Salud	
Don Manuel de la Viña	El Taxo	

Source: AHMP, 1763, Caja 45, Exp. 4, f. 565.

Given the response from the administrators, Salazar decided to send the order directly to the owners in Pátzcuaro. Since he was outside of his jurisdiction, he requested permission from the authorities in Pátzcuaro, which was granted to him with the warning that he should be careful not to exceed his authority. The response from the owners was clear, direct, and confrontational. Don Sebastián de Ugarte said that he would not show him the account books since the workers were not present, and he demanded that Salazar be removed from the case since he was Malavear's relative. In the end, Ugarte simply stated that he would appeal the viceroy's decision. Similarly, don Gerónimo de Zuluaga refused to show him the account books. He claimed that the workers' complaints did not apply to his mines. Salazar then sent the order a second time, but

¹⁶¹ AHMP, 1757, Caja 43, Exp. 2, ff. 564v-566v.

since the owners refused to recognize his authority and simply ignored his requests, he decided to appoint don Manuel Sarmiento, resident of the city of Pátzcuaro, to proceed with the investigation. Even so, they refused to cooperate.¹⁶²

Ultimately, don Manuel Sarmiento, possibly under pressure from the miners, refused to pursue the case, citing a lack of knowledge of legal matters and being too occupied with his own personal business affairs.¹⁶³ Thus, Salazar was unable to continue his assignment and it is unclear whether either the Inguarán miners or Malavear got what they wanted. However, given the categorical order handed down by Viceroy Marqués de Cruillas, it is very likely that the miners decided to cut their losses and let the workers free rather than to continue with the legal process that could potentially expose the abuses that they were committing against their workers, which could lead to more workers leaving the mines and punishment from the viceregal authorities. Thus, once the case turned against them, their final legal defense seems to have been the classic “obedezco pero no cumplo” (I obey but I do not comply), which allowed them to keep their account records closed and the workers’ debt a secret.

The Bourbon Reforms and Rebellion

In the eighteenth century, the Bourbon rulers of Spain launched a series of measures to reform the organization of their kingdoms and overseas territories, known collectively as the Bourbon Reforms. I will focus here on a few reforms that directly affected the mining industry and the region around Guanajuato and Michoacán, and that had a more significant effect on

¹⁶² AHMP, 1757, Caja 43, Exp. 2, f. 570-576.

¹⁶³ AHMP, 1757, Caja 43, Exp. 2, f. 569v-576.

events in the region especially in the second half of the eighteenth century.¹⁶⁴ John Tutino concludes that “Bourbon goals were clear by 1750” but “implementation remained limited.”¹⁶⁵ The legislation was designed to make the Spanish colonial system more efficient, both economically and politically. Silver mining was arguably the most important economic activity in New Spain and, as such, was one of the most important sources of revenue for the Spanish Crown. The demand for silver around the world made it the most valued commodity, the “world’s currency” at a time when worldwide trade was expanding at an ever-increasing rate.¹⁶⁶ All this made silver, and silver mining in particular, an obvious target for the Bourbon reformers.

In the years 1766 and 1767, people in Guanajuato, Michoacán, San Luis Potosí, Pachuca, and other mining regions witnessed some of the most important rebellions against the system before the great rebellions and eventual wars for independence in the early nineteenth century. The causes for these rebellions were multiple; no one issue could be considered as the sole or even main cause. However, the Bourbon administration enacted certain reforms in New Spain that were widely resented, and that contributed to growing tensions between the popular classes and colonial officials. Among the measures, four were especially significant: an increase in the sales tax on basic staples, mainly corn; the establishment of a tobacco monopoly; the formation of militias, with the forcible recruitment of able-bodied men; and the revaluation of tributes,

¹⁶⁴ A good general overview of some of the interpretations provided by scholars on the Bourbon Reforms can be found in the volume edited by Josefina Zoraida Vázquez with the participation of scholars such as Horst Pietschmann and David A. Brading, among others, whose works on the Bourbon Reforms are well-known. Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, ed., *Interpretaciones del siglo XVIII mexicano: el impacto de las Reformas Borbónicas* (Mexico City: Nueva Imagen, 1992).

¹⁶⁵ John Tutino, *Making a New World: Founding Capitalism in the Bajío and Spanish North America* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 231.

¹⁶⁶ Pomeranz and Topik, *The World that Trade Created*, 184.

which led to higher amounts of tribute required from tributaries.¹⁶⁷ For example, in 1765 a total of 678,604 pesos were collected from tributes; in 1766 this amount increased to 810,351; and in 1767 the total amount collected was 913,487 pesos. These annual increases surely impacted indigenous communities.¹⁶⁸

In 1766, after tribute payments had increased some 130,000 pesos from the previous year, rebellion broke out in the mining city of Guanajuato. The violence spread to Real del Monte, San Luis Potosí, and later to Pátzcuaro, Valladolid, and Uruapan in Michoacán.¹⁶⁹ This series of revolts led first to a round of negotiations by the designated intermediaries, followed by a campaign of repression on a scale unseen before in New Spain. José de Gálvez, Visitor General to New Spain, led a tour throughout the region, enlisting the newly created militias, starting first in San Luis de la Paz, then Guanajuato, and eventually making his way south to Michoacán. Loyal criollos—who first hesitated to get involved and then sided with colonial authorities—supported the campaign.

The case of Pátzcuaro is particularly relevant for the present discussion since it reveals a break with past practices, when authorities attempted to resolve labor disputes through a combination of negotiation and accommodation. In Pátzcuaro, the bishop of Michoacán, don Pedro Sánchez, had negotiated peace with indigenous principales in the region, and, in particular, with the indigenous governor, Pedro de Soria Villaroel. In the past, such negotiation would most likely lead to a full pardon or at least to very light sentences against the accused. However, in

¹⁶⁷ Felipe Castro Gutiérrez, *Movimientos Populares en Nueva España: Michoacán, 1766-1767* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Seminario Rebeliones y Revoluciones en México, 1990), 88.

¹⁶⁸ Castro Gutiérrez, *Movimientos Populares*, 88.

¹⁶⁹ Tutino, *Making a New World*, 235-237.

this case. Gálvez ordered five-hundred suspects arrested and, when the bishop objected, Gálvez rejected his “charitable mediation” and declared his mission to “exact obedience in the lives of people subject to our august sovereign.”¹⁷⁰ In the end, one hundred and fifty of the five-hundred arrested received harsh punishments ranging from execution and decapitation to lashes and exile. Governor Pedro de Soria, along with Juan Inocencio de Castro, a mulatto, was executed and decapitated, his head displayed in the public square, his house destroyed, his land salted, and his family exiled. Uruapan faced a similar fate. Both communities, considered *republicas de indios*, lost their privileges as such, including the right to negotiate with colonial authorities.¹⁷¹ Thus, the official response to the 1766-1767 rebellions in New Spain signaled a rupture with the tradition of negotiation and accommodation that had served to mitigate social discontent and to address concerns from different social groups. If indigenous communities had been forced to accept, however, reluctantly, the imposition of coercive institutions, such as the repartimiento, they had also fought to defend the possibility of modifying or adapting specific aspects of the system to their particular circumstances or needs.

After the 1766-1767 rebellions, two other major changes affected indigenous communities in Michoacán. The first was the exponential growth in silver mining productivity in Guanajuato, which led to an increased demand for workers. This growth in productivity can be attributed to several factors, but one is especially important. Silver mining in New Spain after 1554 was mainly carried out through a process known as amalgamation, or the patio process. This process was so dependent on mercury that its availability and price could either increase or

¹⁷⁰ As quoted in Tutito, *Making a New World*, 254.

¹⁷¹ Tutito, *Making a New World*, 254-255.

decrease silver production.¹⁷² The production of mercury was a crown monopoly; throughout the colonial period mine-owners had complained about the amount of available mercury and the price of the commodity. Both issues were addressed by the Bourbon reformers. First, the importation of mercury to the New Spain mines doubled from about five-thousand cwt (500,000 pounds) at the beginning of the eighteenth century to about ten-thousand cwt (1,000,000 pounds) in 1775. Secondly, the Crown lowered the price of mercury from eighty-two pesos per cwt, to sixty-two pesos per cwt in 1767 and then to forty-one pesos per cwt in 1776, thus, cutting in half the price of this fundamental commodity for silver mining.¹⁷³

Another change that followed the 1766-1767 rebellions was the implementation of regulations that gave unprecedented powers to mine owners to control their labor force. Brading states:

...in the sphere of labour relations, as elsewhere, the Gálvez Visitation inaugurated a new stage. The ruthless suppression of the revolts in San Luis Potosí and Guanajuato, combined with the subsequent enrolment of the respectable classes into regiments of militia, strengthened the power of the mine-owners over their workers. In general, discipline became more stringent and in some camps earnings were reduced.¹⁷⁴

This process had begun already before the rebellions, but it was intensified afterwards. For instance, mine operators were given the power to make deductions from workers' wages to pay tribute and religious fees. Also, mine operators could correct and punish workers—without recourse to the courts—with fines for minor offenses. Furthermore, if workers wanted to find a job, they had to provide a warrant detailing their previous employment, thus limiting the

¹⁷² Robert C. West, *The Mining Community in Northern New Spain: The Parral Mining District* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1949), 31-34.

¹⁷³ Brading, *Miners and Merchants*, 141.

¹⁷⁴ Brading, *Miners and Merchants*, 148.

workers' ability to bargain for better wages by going from one job to another without their bosses' authorization. Thus, as Tutino states, "labor discipline was the key to social peace and silver production."¹⁷⁵

Silver Mining on the Rise

The mining industry in Spanish America underwent different periods of growth and decline. Certain specific variables determined whether a particular mining center enjoyed a boom or suffered stagnation; but in general the same factors affected the success of most mining centers in New Spain and the Andes. Often, colonial legislation either hindered or facilitated access to resources that were needed to make the mines more productive and/or profitable: resources such as materials, capital, labor, etc. Silver production in Spanish America increased significantly for the first time in the 1550s, with the discovery of several rich ore deposits, especially in three very productive mining sites: Potosí, Zacatecas, and Guanajuato. Potosí was by far the most productive mining center during the first part of the colonial period; Zacatecas was second, and Guanajuato was a minor but consistent producer. After the initial boom period that lasted until the mid-seventeenth century, all three centers experienced a period of general decline, followed by a dramatic revival in the eighteenth century--especially after 1760.¹⁷⁶

The factors that influenced the revival of the mining industry at the end of the colonial period included technological innovations, new capital investment, and access to labor.¹⁷⁷ The

¹⁷⁵ Tutino, *Making a New World*, 253.

¹⁷⁶ See David A. Brading and Harry E Cross, "Colonial Silver Mining: Mexico and Peru," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 52, no. 4 (1972): 570-577; Richard L. Garner, "Long-Term Silver Mining Trends in Spanish America: A Comparative Analysis of Mexico and Peru," in *Mines of Silver and Gold in the Americas*, edited by Peter J. Bakewell (Brookfield: Variorum, 1997), 898-909.

¹⁷⁷ Brading and Cross, "Colonial Silver Mining," 577.

introduction of gunpowder allowed the excavation of deeper mines and gave miners access to richer deposits. Miners used gunpowder first in Guanajuato and Zacatecas in the early eighteenth century, and then in large excavations at the end of the century. The use of more sophisticated, animal-operated whims in New Spain also made working deeper mines possible in a cost-efficient manner. In the Andes, given the nature of mining operations, especially in Potosí, neither gunpowder nor whims were used extensively. Rather, the use of adits was the most practical way to access and extract metal from the mines. Although not an innovation, new investments in adits contributed to improvements in silver production.¹⁷⁸

One very important component that made the growth of the silver mining industry possible at the end of the colonial period was new capital investments. The Spanish Crown and viceregal authorities in New Spain and Peru played a key role in this growth. The case of Zacatecas is especially illustrative. The Zacatecas mining center underwent an important revival at the end of the colonial period. Although its production did not equal Guanajuato's at the time, it was nonetheless impressive. From the time the mines were discovered in 1546, until they began to be abandoned in 1732, Zacatecas had maintained a consistent production of silver that averaged approximately two million pesos a year.¹⁷⁹ By the 1760s, the mines were in a state of abandonment and neglect. Zacatecas received special attention from Bourbon reformers intent to increase mining output. For example, José de Gálvez and Viceroy Marqués de Croix granted incentives to José de la Borda, a well-established miner who had worked in Taxco and Tlalpujahua, to try to revive some of Zacatecas' old mines. The incentives included an exemption

¹⁷⁸ Brading and Cross, "Colonial Silver Mining," 550-551.

¹⁷⁹ David A. Brading, "Mexican Silver-Mining in the Eighteenth Century: The Revival of Zacatecas," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 50, no. 4 (1970): 669.

from the silver tithe for the duration of the renovation of the mines, a fifty percent tax reduction for twenty years, and a concession to receive mercury at thirty pesos per hundredweight.¹⁸⁰ All these incentives were important factors that convinced Borda to invest his money in Zacatecas, which contributed to the revival of Zacatecas after 1768. Similar scenarios played out in other mining centers in New Spain and the Andes.

Another key factor that helps explain the resurgence of the mining industry in the second half of the eighteenth century was access to and/or control over the labor force. Brading and Cross state that, besides mercury, one key prerequisite for the growth of the mining industry “was the formation of a permanent, probably hereditary, class of mine workers.”¹⁸¹ In New Spain, the labor supply was not inadequate in that New Spain's population was growing at an impressive rate in this period. The population of New Spain more than doubled between 1740 and 1810.¹⁸² Guanajuato was no exception. Claude Morín found that the population of the area of the present-day state of Guanajuato went from approximately 20,000 people in the early seventeenth century to 75,000 in 1700, 265,000 in 1760, 298,000 in 1792, and 495,000 in 1810. This population growth is impressive by any standard.¹⁸³ However, even with such a broad demographic base, miners were faced with labor shortages.

The labor shortages can be explained in part by the fact that miners perceived labor costs as too high, and were always interested in reducing those costs, to increase their margin of profit.

¹⁸⁰ Brading, “The Revival of Zacatecas,” 671.

¹⁸¹ Brading and Cross, “Colonial Silver Mining,” 577.

¹⁸² Brading and Cross, “Colonial Silver Mining,” 577.

¹⁸³ Morín, “Proceso demográfico,” 9. Gavira Márquez states that “one would suppose that the natural growth of the population in the eighteenth century should have provided the necessary workers for the increase in demand of the labor force, but what was needed was a cheap, non-specialized labor force for the low-skill jobs.” Gavira Márquez, *Minería y población*, 48.

Historians have often emphasized the high cost of labor for the miners. For example, Brading and Cross argue that "...labor still remained the chief cost in the mining sector of the industry, accounting to as much as 75 per cent of total expense."¹⁸⁴ Brading described the workers' earnings at one point as "excessively high."¹⁸⁵ Whether the workers' earnings were truly "excessively high" or not is not the main concern here, but rather that the miners perceived it that way and tried to change the situation. Garner observes: "how much a silver producer had to pay in wages and salaries (either in cash or kind) had a major impact on the profitability of the operation," and therefore miners were always trying to cut back on this expense.¹⁸⁶

In Real del Monte, the reduction of wages and suppression of the partido were key factors that led to a series of uprisings that took place from 1766 to 1775.¹⁸⁷ Workers complained about the measures that Pedro Romero de Torreros—owner of the most profitable mines in the Veta Viscaína of Real del Monte—took to minimize his expenses and increase his profits. Ladd states that Romero "insisted that his free workers take cuts to minimize costs and, along with plentiful forced labor provided by the crown, that they work harder, more efficiently, more honestly to produce greater quantities of rich ore."¹⁸⁸ Similarly, in Zacatecas Borda also targeted workers' earnings. While it is true that technological innovation and improved techniques contributed significantly to the resurgence of the Zacatecas mining industry in the late eighteenth century, Brading concludes that these factors cannot account fully for the revival of this mining center

¹⁸⁴ Brading and Cross, "Colonial Silver Mining," 558.

¹⁸⁵ Brading, *Merchants and Miners*, 277.

¹⁸⁶ Garner, "Long-Term Mining Trends," 923.

¹⁸⁷ Ladd, *Making of a Strike*, 8.

¹⁸⁸ Ladd, *Making of a Strike*, 46.

after 1768. According to Brading, cutting costs was a key component in making the new mining operations successful. In Borda's case, Brading states that "we may presume that his superior technique, while the indispensable prerequisite of his success, did not of itself reduce expenses."¹⁸⁹ In fact, a reduction in workers' wages reduced expenses, and perhaps it is this reduction that ultimately explains Borda's favorable outcome. For example, Borda targeted the earning of *barreteros* and *barrenadores*, two of the most skilled mine workers, who had earned as much as 6 reales a day and could keep a quarter of what they produced as their share of the partido. Borda reduced their wages to 4 reales a day and their partido to an eighth of the ore produced. Brading observes that by simply reducing wages from 6 to 4 reales, Borda was able to reduce total mining costs by as much as twenty-five percent.¹⁹⁰ Thus, a suppression of workers' earnings fueled the revival of Zacatecas.

In Guanajuato, miners also targeted workers' earnings. Their target wasn't so much the worker's wages, since they received the standard 4 reales per day, but the partido that many considered to be too high. Thus, owners of some of the largest mines decided to put an end to the payment of partidos. This was done, for example, by the manager of the Rayas mine in 1774; the Valenciana mine followed soon after.¹⁹¹ Often, these actions led to immediate consequences. Brading states that the elimination of partidos led to massive desertion on the part of workers, and labor shortages that put the miners in serious predicaments.¹⁹² The miners tried to replace

¹⁸⁹ Brading, "The Revival of Zacatecas," 673.

¹⁹⁰ Brading, "The Revival of Zacatecas," 672-673.

¹⁹¹ Brading, *Miners and Merchants*, 277.

¹⁹² Brading, *Miners and Merchants*, 289. Brading further states that "a visitor to the town in 1790 confirmed that the secession of partidos had caused a massive desertion."

the partido with higher daily wages for skilled workers from 8 to 10 reales per day, but even that did not satisfy workers since the partido could often represent two to three times their wage (at 4 reales per day, the partido could yield up to 12 reales above their daily wage).¹⁹³ Thus, as Brading states, concerted efforts by the miners to increase their earnings led to a “decisive fall in both the earning and status of the mine-workers of Guanajuato,” and the workers often reacted to this by abandoning the mining center.¹⁹⁴

In the Andes, while new technologies and capital investments also played an important role in the revival of the mining industry, historians have broadly agreed that the revival of the silver mining industry at the end of the colonial period was due, in great part, to the revival of the so-called Toledan system.¹⁹⁵ The system, as it applied to the mining industry of the Andes, was established in the 1570s when Viceroy Francisco de Toledo instituted a series of reforms that promoted the growth of the silver mining industry. He sponsored experiments to use the amalgamation process at Potosí, opened up the mercury mines of Huancavelica, and, more importantly, instituted the *mita*, which provided a great number of workers that miners in both Huancavelica and Potosí required to extract ore successfully from the mines. Brading and Cross state that “The results of this structural reorganization were impressive and immediate.”¹⁹⁶ This

¹⁹³ Brading and Cross, “Colonial Silver Mining,” 558; Garner, “Long-Term Mining Trends,” 929. Povea Moreno clarifies that while in New Spain the imposition of the repartimiento was in fact new to some communities, in Peru it was just an intensification of the same old system as it had been used throughout the preceding two centuries. Isabel M. Povea Moreno, “Coacción y disensión. Protestas frente a los repartimientos mineros en Perú y Nueva España, siglo XVIII,” *Estudios de Historia Novohispana* 53 (2015): 14.

¹⁹⁴ Brading, *Miners and Merchants*, 290.

¹⁹⁵ Brading and Cross, “Colonial Silver Mining,” 577.

¹⁹⁶ Brading and Cross, “Colonial Silver Mining,” 571.

is evidenced by the fact that in Potosí production rose from less than 1 million pesos in 1572 to an impressive 7.5 million pesos by 1592.¹⁹⁷

After a period of decreased production in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, production in Potosí and the Andes picked up again in the 1730s.¹⁹⁸ A significant factor in the growth of the mining industry at that time was not so much the discovery of new, rich ore deposits—as was the case in New Spain—but rather, government policies that cut costs and made mining more profitable to entrepreneurs. For example, the Crown finally relented in 1736 to reduce the rate of taxes paid by miners on silver produced in Potosí from the quinto real (twenty percent) to the tenth (ten percent) that other camps in New Spain and even the Andes already paid.¹⁹⁹ Also, the cost of mercury—so important for the refining of silver and which could be the most expensive item in the refining process—was reduced from an average of 104 pesos per quintal to between 70 and 90 pesos per quintal. This price was still higher than in New Spain, where it was reduced to 41 pesos per quintal in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, but it was nonetheless a significant reduction.²⁰⁰

Finally, historians have highlighted the significant role that the mita system played in the revival of the mining industry in the Andes in the eighteenth century. Brading and Cross observe that “without this source of cheap labor the *cerro rico*, with all its rich ores long since exhausted, could not have continued to work mineral which on average yielded no more than $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce of

¹⁹⁷ Garner, “Long-Term Mining Trends,” 909.

¹⁹⁸ Brading and Cross, “Colonial Silver Mining,” 574.

¹⁹⁹ Brading and Cross, “Colonial Silver Mining,” 561-562.

²⁰⁰ Garner, “Long-Term Mining Trends,” 922.

silver per hundredweight.”²⁰¹ The mita had been instituted as part of the Toledan system in the 1570s, and since that time had provided a big part of the labor force for Potosí, Huancavelica, and other mines. From around 13,000 workers in the late sixteenth century, the number had declined to about 4,000 by the eighteenth century. But even then, the mita was an important component that made the revival of the mining industry in the Andes possible. First, it still provided a significant portion of the working population. Second, it did so at a much-reduced rate, ultimately functioning as a form of subsidy to the miners.²⁰²

Furthermore, the miners could exploit *mitayos* by accepting a cash substitute to hire a replacement, something which Tandeter, Garner, and other historians have described as a transfer of wealth from indigenous communities to the miners and others associated with the mining industry in the Andes. Thus, the mita was an economic incentive to miners in more ways than one and in this manner, as Garner concludes, “despite much criticism on economic, administrative, and moral grounds, the mita survived because it evolved from a short-term labor-supply system into a financial service that helped subsidize Potosí’s miners as mining itself grew more costly and less profitable.”²⁰³ This fact did not escape the notice of the Guanajuato miners when they attempted to re-impose the repartimiento system in the communities of Michoacán. Castro Gutiérrez has observed that “the legendary wealth of Potosí in the viceroyalty of Peru was the example to follow for New Spain’s miners and their utopia. Specifically, they always ambioned for a system like the mita to be introduced...”²⁰⁴ This strategy seems to be what the

²⁰¹ Brading and Cross, “Colonial Silver Mining,” 560.

²⁰² Enrique Tandeter, “Forced and Free Labour in Late Colonial Potosí,” *Past and Present* 93-1 (1981): 99; Brading and Cross, “Colonial Silver Mining,” 560.

²⁰³ Garner, “Long-Term Mining Trends,” 925; Tandeter, “Forced and Free Labour,” 99.

²⁰⁴ Castro Gutiérrez, “La resistencia al repartimiento,” 246.

Guanajuato miners had in mind when, starting in the 1760s, they attempted to expand—both geographically and numerically—the repartimiento system that had been used to recruit workers from Michoacán to the Guanajuato mines in the preceding two centuries.

Conclusion

The Guanajuato-Michoacán region was a dynamic economic region with many competing industries that required a large, stable labor force. Spaniards employed many methods and systems to control labor. One was the repartimiento labor draft, utilized since the late sixteenth century and continuing in many places in the eighteenth century, although at a reduced level. Miners in Guanajuato and Tlalpujahua continued to benefit from the repartimiento because of their significant contributions to the colonial economy, but smaller mining centers like Inguarán could not compete with the larger centers for access to that type of coerced labor. In the eighteenth century, some Spaniards relied on debt peonage to secure a labor force, often against workers' wills, and often to their detriment.

After the middle of the eighteenth century, the implementation of the so-called Bourbon Reforms had disastrous consequences in parts of New Spain, leading in some of the mining zones to rebellion and repression. This process exacerbated already tense social relations and created even more acute labor shortages, especially in Guanajuato where production rose to new unprecedented levels in this period. With the newly instituted Bourbon reforms and support from viceregal authorities, the Guanajuato miners decided to reinstitute the old repartimiento system to meet their labor demands. However, what at first seemed like a simple petition, evolved into a long and protracted process in which the Guanajuato miners, viceregal authorities, and

communities of the Province of Michoacán negotiated the terms under which the well-established repartimiento system would operate, as we will see in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

The New Repartimiento, 1770-1800

Over the course of the last quarter of the sixteenth century and the seventeenth century, the repartimiento system had been used to satisfy the labor demands of the Guanajuato mining center as well as many other mining centers throughout New Spain. The first half of the eighteenth century continued much the same way as the preceding centuries. The Tarascan communities in Michoacán continued to send workers to the Guanajuato mines, although by that time the number of workers that went to the mines had diminished significantly. The natural growth of the population—either through births or migration—seems to have been enough to mostly satisfy the labor demand in this mining center. However, the system was still in place and became more significant when the impact of the Bourbon Reforms began to be felt in the middle of the eighteenth century. Several of these reforms caused upheaval among the population of Guanajuato, which led to outbreaks of violence that affected the labor force in this mining town. Among those measures, four were especially important: increase in sales tax of some basic staples, mainly corn; the establishment of a tobacco monopoly; the formation of militias; and the revaluation of tributes.¹

Besides those changes, there were some underlying problems that stemmed from the long-term impact of the mining industry on the workers and their communities. Brigida Von Mentz has convincingly argued that independently of all the changes brought about by the Bourbon Reforms, there was already widespread discontent in the countryside caused by the

¹ The revaluation of tributes led to a significant increase in tribute collected. For example, in 1765 a total of 678,604 pesos were collected from tributes, in 1766 this amount went up to 810,351, and in 1777 the total amount collected was 913,487 pesos, a considerable increase that surely impacted indigenous communities. Castro Gutiérrez, *Movimientos populares*, 88.

pressures of the mining industry on the communities that provided workers for the mines. In fact, she suggests that more important than the Bourbon Reforms to explain the series of uprisings that took place after 1766 was the discontent of the mine workers with the changes to their wages and share of partido, and the forced recruitment of workers from indigenous communities.² Thus, the recently introduced changes of the Bourbon Reforms, combined with the long-term pressures of the mining industry led to a reaction from the workers who in many cases decided to abandon the mining center. This led to a labor shortage, which forced the miners to consider alternatives. With silver production on the rise and a stronger, more centralized state supporting the mining industry, the miners decided to make use of the old institution of the repartimiento to satisfy their needs.³

The Guanajuato Miners' Solution

Confronted with increased production and a labor shortage, the Guanajuato miners devised a plan to address their problems. From the beginning of the 1760s, the miners had started sending petitions to Pátzcuaro's alcalde mayor, asking him to send more workers to the mines. By 1777, the situation had reached what the miners described as a critical point that put the mines in "imminent danger of being closed."⁴ Since they had not received a positive response from Pátzcuaro's alcalde mayor, they decided to consult the viceroy, don Antonio María de

² Brígida von Mentz, "Coyuntura minera y protesta campesina en el centro de Nueva España, siglo XVIII," in *La minería mexicana: de la colonia al siglo XX*, edited by Inés Herrera Canales, 23-45 (México: Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, 1998), 30, 42.

³ For studies that analyze the attempt by the Guanajuato miners to re-introduce the repartimiento system in Michoacán, see Castro Gutiérrez, "La resistencia al repartimiento,"; Gavira Márquez, *Minería y población*; Von Mentz, "Coyuntura minera"; Eduardo Miranda Arrieta, "La importancia del sistema de repartimiento para las minas de la zona central de México," *Tzintzun*, 22 (1995): 95-109; Povea Moreno, "Coacción y disensión."

⁴ AHMM, Exhorto, 1777, Caja 48, Exp. 15, f. 1v.

Bucareli y Ursúa, who, two months later, sent an order to make Pátzcuaro's corregidor comply with the miners' petition.⁵ However, the miners did not simply want to modify the already well-established repartimiento system, but rather they sought to change relations between the mining center and the indigenous communities of Michoacán, which would be forced to provide the workers. At that moment, the number of workers going to Guanajuato from Michoacán was 30 per month, coming from the so-called Sierra Tarasca. The miners were asking for an increase of 150 workers, for a total of 180 per month.

On April 1777, the corregidor of the Michoacán province issued an order so that the communities could be notified of what was required of them. The order went to more than fifty towns in Michoacán, including the following *tenencias* and their subject towns: Erongarícuaro, Santa Clara del Cobre, Pátzcuaro, Indaparapeo, Chucándiro, Puruándiro, Angamacutiro, Tacámbaro, Huaniqueo, Cocupao, Tarímbaro, Tiripitío, Uruapan, Parangaricutiro, and Paracho (see map 4.1). Also, included in this petition were towns from the *alcaldía mayor* of Jiquilpan. Each town would have to provide the number of workers assigned to them (see tables 4.1 and 4.2). For instance, Parangaricutiro and its subject towns would have to provide a total of 24 workers, while Paracho and its subject towns would provide eight. These workers, along with all those from other towns, were expected to arrive in Guanajuato by the end of July. However, this is not what happened. Of the 150 workers who were expected, only 34 went, plus the 30 that already used to go, for a total of 64. This number was far below what the miners had anticipated, and they soon complained.

⁵ Since 1550, Michoacán's chief magistrate had been called *alcalde mayor*, but in 1775 the title was changed to *corregidor*, and in 1787 it would become *intendente* when New Spain was reorganized into *intendencias*. Gerhard, *Guide*, 346-347.



Map 4.1: Tenencias in the Alcaldía Mayor of Valladolid-Pátzcuaro. Map by Mariza Serrano, based on Gerhard, *Guide*, 344.

In a first attempt to comply with the viceroy's order, the corregidor had sent the instructions with his tenientes, who passed the message to the gobernadores and other *oficiales de república* so that they could supply the necessary workers. This approach did not work; most towns had cited several reasons not to send the workers, including disease, work on other public projects, and the existence of royal decrees excluding them from this obligation. The corregidor, most likely pressured by Guanajuato's alcalde mayor, decided to send a *conductor personero* who was charged with ensuring that each town fulfilled its responsibility. The person assigned to

this task was Francisco Valdés; he was instructed not to “accept from the natives excuses nor pretexts, warning the tenientes in charge that the least omission would be seriously punished.”⁶ By that time, the number required by the miners had increased from 180 to 210 workers every six weeks, which could be as many as 1,700 different workers per year. Thus, in the middle of August 1777, Valdés took to the road and started his long, arduous task of making sure the communities complied.

Table 4.1: Towns Subject to the New Repartimiento, Province of Michoacán, 1777

Tenencia	Town	Workers Requested*
San Juan Parangaricutiro	TOTAL: 24 (lower to 12)¹	
	San Juan Parangaricutiro	4
	Santa Ana Tzirosto	4
	San Pedro Zacán	4
	San Marcos Apo	2
	San Salvador Paricutín	2
	Santiago Angahuan	2
	San Francisco Corupo	4
	San Felipe de los Herreros	2
	Erongarícuaro	TOTAL: 12 + 1 papite
Erongarícuaro		5 (1 papite)
San Andrés Tziróndaro		1
San Francisco Uricho		0 ²
Arocutín		0 ²
Puácuaro		0 ²
Santa María Huiramangaro		1
San Juan Tumbio		1
Ajuno		1
San Jerónimo Purenchécuaro		--
San Francisco Pichátaro		2 (cannot commit)
Zirahuén		1
Jaracuaro		0 ²
Santa Clara del Cobre	TOTAL: 4 (no para siempre)	
	Santa Clara del Cobre	4
	Santa María Opopeo	--
Pátzcuaro	TOTAL: 0	
	Pátzcuaro	--
	Jarácuaro	--
	Santa María Tzentzenguaro	--
Indaparapeo	TOTAL: 4	
	Indaparapeo	--
	Santiago Tzinguio	--
San Nicolás Chucándiro	TOTAL: 3 + 1 papite (no more)	

⁶ AHMM, Exhorto, 1777, Caja 48, Exp. 15, f. 32v. Castro Gutiérrez, “La resistencia al repartimiento,” 249.

	San Nicolás Chucándiro	1 (1 papite)/3
Puruándiro		TOTAL: 25/8 (due to fever)
	Puruándiro	4 ¹
	Huango	2
	Numarán (no sierra)	2
San Francisco Angamacutiro		TOTAL: 7
	San Francisco Angamacutiro	2 ¹
	Santiago Conguripo	1
	Santa Fe del Río	2
	San Miguel Epejana	1 (turns with Panindicuaro)
	San Andrés Panindicuaro	1(turns with Epejana)
	Santa María Aguanuato	1
San Gerónimo Tacámbaro		TOTAL: 2
	San Gerónimo Tacámbaro	2
Santa Marta Huaniqueo		TOTAL: 2
	Santa Martha Huaniqueo	0 ¹
	Teremendo (más papite)	Have always given 2
	Santiago Capula	0 ¹
	Tacícuaró	0 ¹
	San Nicolás Obispo	0 ¹
San Diego Cocupao		TOTAL: 10+
	San Diego Cocupao	Usually 2, now 4
	Tiríndaro	1 more
	Zipiajo	1 more
	Azajo	1 more
	Coeneo	1 more
	Naranja	1 more
	Tarejero	--
	Comanja	--
	Zacapu	1 more
San Juan de Dios Tiripitío		TOTAL: 5
	San Juan de Dios Tiripitío	5
	San Nicolás Acuitzio	--
	Jesús Huiramba	--
San Francisco Uruapan		TOTAL: 9 + 1 papite (no more)
	San Francisco Uruapan	2 (1 papite)
	Jucutacato	1
	Jicalán	1
	San Lorenzo	1
	Tingambato	2
	San Ángel Zurumucapio	--
	San Andrés Ziracuaretiro	1
	Taretan	1
San Pedro Paracho		TOTAL: 21 (6 used to go)
	San Pedro Paracho	1
	San Mateo Agueran	1
	Santa Cruz Janaco	1
	Santa María Cherán Atzticurin	1
	San Bartolome Cocucho	1
	Santiago Nunro	1
	Santa María Urapicho	1
	San Miguel Pomacuaran	1/11

	San Gerónimo Aranza	0 ¹
	San Luis Naguatzen	1/7/0
	Santa María Sevina	1/0
	San Juan Cojoacuaro	1/3
	San Andres Turiguaro	1
	Santa María Comahen	1/0
	Santa María Guinico	1
	Santa María Arantepacua	1
	San Francisco Cherán	2/0
	Quinceo	--
	Capácuaro	--
Tarímbaro		TOTAL: 6 (only ones they can give)
	Tarímbaro	4
	Chiquimitio	2
ALL TENENCIAS		Approximately: 117-134

Sources: AGN, Indios, 1778, Vol. 66, Exp. 113, ff. 158-1558v; AGN, Minería, 1779, Vol. 148, ff. 212-218v.

* The number of workers that actually went to the mines is not clear since most towns did not fully comply.

¹ Towns that asked to be relieved from repartimiento for possession of Real Provisión.

² Towns that asked to be relieved from repartimiento since population was too small.

Table 4.2: Towns Subject to the New Repartimiento, Alcaldía Mayor of Jiquilpan, 1777

Cabecera	Sujeto	Workers Requested/Sent
Tingüindín		--
	Pamatácuaro	--
	Sicuicho	--
	Atapan	--
	Tacátzcuaro	--
San Francisco Tacuarécuaro		--
	San Miguel	--
Patamban		--
	San Pedro Ocumicho	--
	San José	--
San Antonio Charapan		--
Tarecuato		--
		TOTAL: 30/13

Sources: AGN, Indios, 1778, Vol. 66, Exp. 113, ff. 158-1558v; AGN, Minería, 1779, Vol. 148, ff. 212-218v.

Reactions from Indigenous Communities

As could be expected, many towns in Michoacán continued to express their opposition to what was expected of them, although in most cases they did not completely preclude

negotiation.⁷ Such was the case with the people of Chucándiro. They argued that their population was very small and that they were already in charge of fixing roads and bridges used to transport people and goods to and from the Guanajuato mines. Also, they claimed to be employed on nearby landed estates that produced corn and wheat used to supply Guanajuato with such important products. However, “to show obedience and submissiveness,” they were willing to provide three workers. Valdés was satisfied with this.⁸ Similarly, the town of Numarán stated that it was not customary to include them in the *tandas* since they were not from the Sierra Tarasca, the region from which most workers serving under the repartimiento came. But to show respect to the corregidor, they were willing to send two workers.⁹

Other towns more openly opposed any possibility of being included in the service. One was the town of Puruándiro, where the principales showed a provision issued by the Audiencia Real in 1763 ordering that “neither Pátzcuaro’s alcalde mayor, nor any of his tenientes should bother them to go work to any of the mines in Guanajuato, nor should they obey on this issue the letters of request from the justice of this district.” Having seen the letter, Valdés was satisfied with its content and continued his journey.¹⁰ Other towns were even more hostile to what was being asked of them. For instance, the town of San Juan Parangaricutiro, required to send twenty-four workers, said that they would comply with the order “not to show lack of respect,” but that they wanted the number to be reduced to twelve and that, based on the abuses to which

⁷ Castro Gutiérrez points out the fact that while indigenous communities in Michoacán were being forced to provide workers to the mines and their communities suffered losses, they did not resort to violence at any point in the long legal process, as often happened in similar cases. “La resistencia al repartimiento,” 77.

⁸ AHMM, Exhorto, 1777, Caja 48, Exp. 15, f. 43.

⁹ AHMM, Exhorto, 1777, Caja 48, Exp. 15, f. 46v.

¹⁰ AHMM, Exhorto, 1777, Caja 48, Exp. 15, f. 44.

they were subjected, they would go to the Audiencia Real with a provision that they had.¹¹

Similarly, leaders from Uruapan, a constant and reliable provider of workers for the Guanajuato mines throughout the colonial period, after being required to send more workers, said that they were not willing to send more than the five workers that they already sent and that they would submit a complaint with the corregidor, if necessary.¹²

After learning of the towns' response to his orders, on November, 1777, the corregidor issued a stricter order in which he expressed clearly that no excuses should be accepted, nor any provisions predating the most recent order given by Viceroy Bucareli. He also asked the towns to be reminded of the benefits that came from participating in the repartimiento system. These included the right to sell their goods in Guanajuato without paying taxes, as well as the right of the workers to remain in the mining center or to return to their towns if they so desired.¹³ However, this was not enough to convince the townspeople of Michoacán. And, although Valdés continued his task until March 1778, by that time most of the towns had submitted a series of petitions to the viceroy demanding not only a modification to what was required of them through the repartimiento system, but rather a complete exclusion from this institution.

What had started as an attempt by the Guanajuato miners to re-impose the repartimiento system led to an overwhelming response on the part of the towns in Michoacán. The conditions that had made it possible to establish this system in the middle of the sixteenth century had changed. The system of negotiation that had made possible its implementation during two centuries had been replaced by an authoritarian regime that tried to impose a law that the affected

¹¹ AHMM, Exhorto, 1777, Caja 48, Exp. 15, f. 48.

¹² AHMM, Exhorto, 1777, Caja 48, Exp. 15, f. 48v.

¹³ AHMM, Exhorto, 1777, Caja 48, Exp. 15, f. 35.

groups were not willing to tolerate. Ironically, the Guanajuato miners' attempt to intensify the repartimiento system had encouraged town leaders to try to eradicate the system, which, although tolerated for two-hundred years, had no rationale in the social and political context of the late-eighteenth century.

The Legal Struggle Against the New Repartimiento

Valdés was still working in Michoacán to gather workers for the Guanajuato mines when the communities affected by the draft started their legal struggle against the imposition of the new repartimiento. In one of the most interesting exchanges in the struggle against the new repartimiento, viceregal authorities, indigenous communities, and the Guanajuato miners debated the nature of the repartimiento system, its function, and, ultimately, the justification of its continued existence. This was, in a sense, a dissection of the repartimiento. This exchange provides a description of the system as it had functioned for two-hundred years and the role played by the miners, indigenous communities, and Spanish authorities at all levels that made the system work. Also, it highlights the reasons why its re-imposition was not viable in the Guanajuato-Michoacán region at the time it was implemented.

Between July 1777 and February 1780, community leaders submitted a total of sixteen lawsuits. The cases were usually submitted by leaders of head towns, by one of the tenencias in the Michoacán province in their name and that of their subject towns. For instance, Tiríndaro filed a lawsuit in 1778 along with its subject towns of San Diego Cocupao, Sipiaxo, Azaxo, Cueneo, Naranja, Jarexero, and Comanja, while Tingambato did the same along with its subject towns of San Ángele Turumucapio, San Andrés Ziricuairetiro, and Taretan. However, other

tenencias combined their complaints into one case. One example is that of the communities around Lake Pátzcuaro. The tenencias of Erongarícuaro, Santa Clara del Cobre, and Pátzcuaro, along with their subject towns, filed a combined lawsuit in 1777. The plaintiffs would start their cases by gathering testimonies from local clergy, Spanish colonists, and authorities, which they would take to the tenientes in charge of their tenencias. The tenientes would often provide further evidence or statements of support, after which they would send the case to the corregidor of the Michoacán province, don Juan Sevillano. The corregidor would inevitably conclude that such cases were not within his jurisdiction and would return the proceedings to the communities so that they could proceed with them to the the Audiencia Real and the viceroy in Mexico City.¹⁴

Once in Mexico City, the cases were analyzed by viceregal authorities who would recommend specific actions to be taken by the Audiencia Real and the viceroy. Two functionaries in the viceregal government, in particular, were in charge of handling the cases. First, the fiscal, Baltasar Ladrón de Guevara, was the main person in charge of analyzing the cases and providing his recommendation on the actions to be taken.¹⁵ Second, the asesor general, Martín Aramburu,

¹⁴ The response by the corregidor would be as follows: “El señor licenciado don Juan Sevillano [...] habiendo visto estas diligencias y en ellas la precedente información producida por los naturales del pueblo de Indaparapeo con la que justifican las vejaciones que se les confirman de ocurrir a las tandas de la minas de Guanajuato en atención a no ser su merced facultativo para exonerarlos de esta pensión manda se les devuelvan dichas diligencias para que ocurran a la soberanía del excelentísimo señor virrey gobernador y capitán general de esta Nueva España a impetrar la gracia que pretenden depositando las causas que les asisten por tocar privativamente a la superioridad de su excelentísima esta cuestión.” AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 192v.

¹⁵ Baltasar Ladrón de Guevara was a very accomplished functionary. A lawyer by profession, Guevara served in several different positions in the viceregal government starting in the mid-eighteenth century and was described as a hard-working, talented, and diligent individual. *Diario de México* (Mexico City: Oficina de Don Juan Bautista de Arizpe, 1807), 62. Sarrelangue describes Guevara as a “Sagacísimo observador, culto escritor, excelente magistrado y vecino ejemplar de la Muy Noble y Muy Leal ciudad de México...Guevara fue un político en el prístino sentido de cuidar del justo y concertado regimiento de la polis, de su ciudad.” Delfina López Sarrelangue, “La policía de la ciudad de México en 1788,” in *Estudios sobre la Ciudad Iberoamericana*, ed. Francisco de Solano (Madrid: C.S.I.C, 1983), 227. González-Polo describes Guevara as an “Inquisitivo, observador, hombre de letras y urbanista moderno de alto grado...” He adds: “Hay que hacer notar que los conocimientos de Guevara no solo provienen de la observación directa, diaria y prolongada que ejerce como funcionario durante más de cincuenta años—tuvo cuatro veces el gobierno de la Nueva España—, sino, también, del intensivo de la lectura y el dominio de la historia.” Ignacio González-Polo, “La ciudad de México a fines del siglo xviii: Disquisiciones sobre un manuscrito anónimo,”

was also in charge of looking at the cases and, based on his own conclusions, agree or disagree with the fiscal and provide his own recommendations to the viceroy.¹⁶ Then, based on the recommendations of these two functionaries and his own conclusions, the viceroy would make a decision, which was often followed with a decree. In the cases that we will examine here, at no point did the viceregal authorities disagree with the actions to be taken. Whatever Guevara suggested, Aramburu supported, and Viceroy Bucareli approved and followed by issuing the necessary decrees.¹⁷

After July 1777, when several cases started making their way to the viceregal chamber, the cases were usually combined into one file. That was the situation, for instance, with Indaparapeo's file, which was combined with that of Chucándiro and Tingüindín, although they were all submitted independently. Viceregal authorities initially responded to the different cases as they came, but after a while, when it became clear that this was a complicated legal issue that could not be resolved on a piecemeal basis, the viceregal authorities decided to confront it head on, and asked Guanajuato's Diputación de Minería to provide a general argument to justify their request to impose the repartimiento on the communities of Michoacán. This strategy shifted the burden of proof from the communities of Michoacán, who had to prove that the repartimiento was causing them harm, to the Guanajuato miners, who had to prove that the repartimiento was

Historia Mexicana, 26, no. 1 (1976): 38-40. Guevara's knowledge of the law and broad understanding of practical matters would be evidenced in the impressive, thorough, well-reasoned response he provided in the debate over the use of the repartimiento system in Guanajuato.

¹⁶ Marín Aramburu was also a recognized functionary in the eighteenth century. Also a lawyer by profession, he is described as "uno de los más brillantes abogados de la audiencia real" and his writings as "llenos de la más pura y sólida doctrina en ambos derechos." Jacinto Pimentel y Fagoaga and Fernando Pimentel y Faogaga, *Obras completas de don Francisco Pimentel*, vol. 5 (Mexico City: Tipografía Económica, 1904), 446.

¹⁷ It was very common for the cases to end with the following statement: "Como lo pide el señor fiscal y subscribe el licenciado Aramburu." AGN, Minería, Vol. 148, f. 12v.

necessary and justified. Also, this change shifted the dynamic of the case. Whereas in 1777 the viceroy had supported fully the demands of the Guanajuato miners, now the viceregal authorities were, in essence, on the side of the communities of Michoacán.

On August 1778, Guevara wrote an extensive, well-reasoned twenty-eight-point reply to the petitions of the communities in Michoacán. Both, in the tone and argument of the writing, the fiscal had become an advocate for the communities of Michoacán and expressed strong, well-reasoned objections to the implementation of the repartimiento. In points one through four, Guevara summarized objections raised by the communities of Michoacán against the repartimiento. In point five, he addressed the legal precedents of the case, and then described legislation relating to the mining industry, the use of forced labor, and the rights of indigenous workers--issues that he would elaborate on in the remaining points. Guevara claimed that he would attempt to find a middle ground between what the Guanajuato miners and the indigenous communities of Michoacán demanded. He stated that he would analyze the cases and would try to "...harmonize the two extremes, that is, the work and growth of the mines, and the freedom and good treatment of the Indians."¹⁸

Aramburu suggested that, based on the nature of the case, the Real Tribunal de Minería should be given an opportunity to reply to Guevara's assessment. On November 1778 they did so, but only in a preliminary manner, addressing some of the main or most urgent issues. The first matter that they addressed was the participation of indigenous communities of Michoacán in the repartimiento. The miners admitted that abuses could have been committed against repartimiento workers and that workers were fully within their rights to demand redress of

¹⁸ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 95v. "...hermanar los dos extremos, a saber, el beneficio y aumento de las minas, y la libertad, y buen tratamiento de los indios."

grievances. But they argued that their intention to exempt themselves completely from the repartimiento system was contrary to the spirit of the laws and against the interests of the Crown. They claimed that if the repartimiento was applied within the limits established by the legislation, not only would it not be harmful to indigenous communities, but rather would be of great benefit to them. They explained that the miners already recruited idle Spaniards, mestizos, and mulatos, as the law required, but since it was not enough to satisfy the labor demands, they used repartimiento workers, but only in the easiest tasks. They admitted that some mine supervisors, *sacagentes*, and conductores abused their power and mistreated workers, but they argued that these abuses did not justify abandoning the entire system. As to the cited complaints by affected communities, they argued that they were unsubstantiated claims, supported with reports or declarations by witnesses taken without the necessary legal procedures, thus lacking legal validity.¹⁹

While the miners' representatives addressed some major concerns with this response, they needed more time to come up with an adequate reply to the thorough, twenty-eight-point response provided by Guevara. This need was fully justified and expected, given that the existence of the repartimiento system itself was at stake and that the Guanajuato miners were not going to give up without a fight. However, after the response submitted on November 1778, many months would pass before the miners replied. By March 1779 viceregal authorities were becoming impatient with the lack of response from the miners and issued a strongly-worded order giving the miners fifteen days to provide a response to the case presented against them by the communities of Michoacán.²⁰ By May 1779 the Guanajuato miners had failed to respond,

¹⁹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 123-124v.

²⁰ AGN, Minería, 1779, Vol. 66, Exp. 154, ff. 196-196v.

and another order was issued by the viceregal authorities, giving the miners six days to reply.²¹ By June 4, 1779, when the miners still had not provided a response, José Mariano del Rosal, Indaparapeo's lawyer, accused them of being in default and requested that a fine be imposed on the miners for their lack of action.²² The miners' lawyers replied that they had not been given enough time. They had been given six days to reply to a thirty-seven-page document and they had not had enough time to consult with the miners on these very complicated issues. Thus, they asked for another extension. On June 12, the miners were again given another extension of nine days, after which they would be declared in default and the fine imposed.²³

However, the waiting was far from over. The miners' lawyers were surely working hard, but could not produce a reply to all the accusations made against them, first by the communities in Michoacán, and later supported and expanded by the fiscal. On June 23, they received yet another extension of eleven days to receive instructions from the miners and nine more to reply. This allowance, however, proved to be insufficient once again. On July 1, Bernardo Cervantes, a lawyer representing the miners, asked for a file containing information that he claimed was necessary to continue the case. However, the file could not be found. All through July and August, viceregal authorities looked everywhere, but to no avail. Cervantes used this excuse to prolong the time he had to write his response. On September 9, he exclaimed that the file "...is considered necessary, and it is such that there is perfect knowledge of the matter at hand."²⁴ He insisted that he should not be penalized for not submitting a reply when the file had not been

²¹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 194.

²² AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 200.

²³ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 201-201v.

²⁴ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 224v.

found. Whether or not the file had a bearing on the case, the fact that it had not been found afforded the miners with a welcome excuse.

On September 10, viceregal authorities seemed to have exhausted their patience with Cervantes and demanded that, with or without the lost file, he submit the reply. They gave him two days to do so. Again, no reply was given. On October 5, Mariano Pérez de Tagle, lawyer for the community of Tingüindín, accused Cervantes of being in default again and demanded a fine to be imposed. It is unclear whether the fine was imposed or not but, finally, on October 16, 1779, Cervantes submitted the long-awaited reply. After more than a year since Guevara had submitted his recommendations on what he thought should be done with the repartimiento for the Guanajuato mines, Bernardo Cervantes, representing Guanajuato's Diputación de Minería, provided a thorough, thirty-seven-point reply. This reply addressed most of the complaints by Michoacán's communities and those raised by Guevara. It provides valuable information on the nature of the repartimiento and the miners' view of the system. In fact, the opening statement of the reply exemplifies the miners' attitude towards the system. After quickly stating the facts of the case, Cervantes went straight to the point and asked, in a categorical manner, that the *órdenes superiores* decreed on March and June 1777, ordering Michoacán communities to provide the workers requested by the Guanajuato miners, be fulfilled. He did this despite the fact that many orders contradicting or even cancelling those *órdenes superiores* had since been issued.²⁵

Cervantes then brazenly requested: "Your excellency will be so kind to order that the [órdenes superiores] be promptly observed, issuing a decree in the most precise and strict terms so that the *alcaldes mayores* arrange, without any delay, and under threat of severe punishment, for four-hundred or five-hundred Indians to go in each *tanda* of repartimiento from the

²⁵ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 227.

communities, including those that were exempted from the jurisdiction of Pátzcuaro.”²⁶ This opening salvo set the strong and defiant tone of the miners’ reply. In the thirty-seven points that followed, Cervantes would elaborate on the many reasons why miners considered the repartimiento system to be justified. The following section analyzes the complaints submitted by indigenous communities of Michoacán, the response by Guevara to those claims, and finally the arguments offered by Cervantes on behalf of the miners to counter those claims.

Reasons to be Exempted from Repartimiento Labor

In their legal struggles, the communities of Michoacán provided several compelling reasons why they should not be required to send workers to Guanajuato through the repartimiento. These reasons were supported with evidence and testimony from indigenous and Spanish authorities in Michoacán, as well as by Spanish colonists and clergymen who testified in their favor. In essence, these justifications framed the discussion that would follow between viceregal authorities—mainly the fiscal—and Guanajuato miners, represented by Cervantes. Different communities in Michoacán emphasized one or another reason to be exempted, which collectively mounted a strong argument against the institution of the repartimiento as it applied to Michoacán. These reasons included: the early colonial rationale for the system; the occupation of the workers in other areas considered important; the existence of previous decrees; the absence of *costumbre*; the great distance between these communities and the mines; the lack of pay for the days of travel it took the workers to get to the mines; the detrimental change in climate experienced by the workers; the damage that was caused to indigenous communities that

²⁶ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 227v.

provided the workers; the problems of collecting tribute from the workers; and the exploitative nature of the institution. We will consider each of these reasons.

Previous Justifications: Idleness and Laziness

On a fundamental level, laws justifying repartimiento labor in the sixteenth century had made certain assumptions, or claims, that explained why it was necessary to compel workers, in this case from Michoacán, to go to work in the mines. One of those assumptions was that indigenous men were, by nature, inclined to idleness and needed to be forced to work to be productive members of society. Based on this notion, Spanish authorities considered the repartimiento as means to achieve this end. The justification was widely known, and indigenous communities involved in the litigation addressed it directly. Mariano Pérez de Tagle, representing Erongarícuaro and other towns around Lake Pátzcuaro, stated that when the repartimiento was introduced in the late sixteenth century, it had been justified due to the natural tendency of indigenous men to idleness and laziness and the importance of the mining industry for the Crown, as long as it was done in a tolerable and justified way, so that workers would not live oppressed and in a state of slavery. Now, Pérez de Tagle argued, the people he represented were fully engaged in working their own lands and in mills, charcoal factories, smelting plants, and nearby mines, so that it was unnecessary to force them to go to the Guanajuato mines.²⁷

Cervantes's reply on behalf of the miners was not surprising. He simply reiterated old claims about indigenous workers being lazy and attempted to focus on the extra benefits that indigenous workers received from working in the mines. Cervantes claimed that indigenous men's natural inclination to idleness was often the cause of their misfortune in life, and making

²⁷ AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 148, ff. 9v-10.

them work in the mines was a way to get them out of such an unfortunate condition. In fact, he argued that those who were diligent enough could take advantage of the opportunities offered by such work and could benefit from it. Furthermore, he repeated a very common view (or excuse) at the time: that it was the rustic men who were responsible for carrying out physical work, because they were naturally disposed to it. Naturally, those of superior intellect should lead the workers; the superior ones performed worthier functions, which were often even more laborious than the physical labor that the workers performed.²⁸ Whatever the benefits that mining labor might have brought to the average worker, indigenous communities in Michoacán did not share Cervantes's views of the necessity of repartimiento or its benefits. Instead, they provided ample evidence that contradicted his claims.

In order to support the claim that they were fully employed, and not idle or lazy, as was often claimed, leaders of Indigenous communities cited their service in other important economic activities of the region that proved that they did not need to be forced to work in order to engage in productive activities. This proof of active, productive labor, they argued, justified excluding them from the repartimiento to Guanajuato. They argued that men from many of the communities targeted by the new repartimiento were already involved in copper and silver mining operations in the region. Communities around Lake Pátzcuaro, which were within the recruiting zone of the copper mines of Inguarán and the refining center of Santa Clara del Cobre, made this argument. Even though Indigenous workers were often reluctant to work there voluntarily, and at times mine owners had to use coercive mechanisms to recruit and retain a labor force, it was true that many communities around Lake Pátzcuaro contributed workers to this important industry.

²⁸ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 239v.

Don Pablo Fauste de la Roca testified on behalf of workers from Santa Clara del Cobre and Santa María Opopo that they had never been required to send workers to Guanajuato, in part because of their continued occupation in the charcoal factories, foundries, and other jobs related to the production of copper.²⁹ Similarly, Tacámbaro's indigenous authorities argued that, besides being busy rebuilding their church and other important local projects, people from this town regularly went to work in the copper mines of Santa Clara del Cobre, a fact confirmed by several witnesses. In fact, don Juan Bautista Gurtubai, a forty-seven-year-old Spaniard living in Tacámbaro, not only confirmed that workers from that town went to work in the copper mines, but he asserted that the climate there was favorable, unlike Guanajuato, where the climate differed so much from that of Tacámbaro that it affected the workers' health.³⁰

The townspeople of Indaparapeo testified to the participation of its workers in the mining industry of the Otzumatlán mining center as justification to be exempted from the repartimiento in Guanajuato. They stated that that mining center was barely four leagues away from their town, as opposed to Guanajuato, which was more than forty leagues away. They asked that if it was absolutely necessary to force workers from Indaparapeo to partake in the mining industry, that it should be to the mines of Otzumatlán, and that it should be specified that they would be liable to provide workers only for that mining center and no other.³¹ Don Antonio Rafael, indigenous governor of the town, testified that, in fact, workers from Indaparapeo regularly worked in the mines of Otzumatlán of their own free will and therefore were already making an important contribution to this industry without the need for coercion. This statement was corroborated by

²⁹ AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 148, f. 6.

³⁰ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 249v-250v.

³¹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 183.

the town's teniente, don Domingo José de Villegas, and other witnesses who claimed that workers were well treated in Otzumatlán, where they were paid 2 reales a day, rather than the 1.5 reales offered by Guanajuato miners. Some even got more, depending on their jobs, and since it was so close to their communities, workers did not neglect obligations, such as paying their tribute or participating in religious celebrations.³²

In addition to demonstrating that people were already working in the local mining industry of Michoacán, leaders of communities indicated other occupations that were deemed just as important as mining, especially those that served the mining industry directly or indirectly. For instance, people from Chucándiro claimed that they had always been excluded from repartimiento service to all mining centers, but especially Guanajuato, given their responsibility to take care of and repair the road going through their town, since it was part of the Camino Real leading to Guanajuato, San Miguel, Celaya, San Luis Potosí and many other towns that had commercial relations with the towns of Tierra Caliente (Hot Land, a region comprising parts of present-day southern Michoacán and northern Guerrero) that provided many valuable products such as sugar, cotton, salt, wheat flour, cheese--and many others that were vital to the mining industry.³³

Some witnesses testifying on behalf of Chucándiro provided specific examples of how the road became damaged when workers had been recruited to go to the Guanajuato mines to fulfill repartimiento service. Don Juan de Escalante, a sixty-year-old Spanish resident, claimed that a bridge was in such a bad state that he knew of several travelers and muleteers who had almost lost their lives in accidents trying to cross it. In fact, Escalante cited one case—that he

³² AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, 185v-192.

³³ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, 202-202v.

claimed to have witnessed—when two mules, one loaded with sugar and the other with *panocha* (unrefined brown sugar), lost their footing and fell to the side of the bridge. He stated that, fortunately, in this case neither the mules nor the muleteers had lost their lives, but they lost their loads, and that this was a common occurrence, especially during the rainy season.³⁴

Chucándiro's priest, José Tovar, claimed that since the workers from his parish were forced to go to the Guanajuato mines, he was not able to fulfill his religious duties properly due to the poor conditions of the roads, which made it extremely dangerous for him to go from one place to another, as his job required. Nor could his parishioners come to him during the rainy season, unless they risked their lives in making a dangerous trip along the impassable roads. He also claimed to have been a witness to accidents in which people had lost their merchandise and nearly lost their lives while making the dangerous trip on the poorly maintained roads.³⁵

Similarly, the town of Angamacutiro argued that thirty-six years ago they had built a bridge over the Angulo river, which allowed travelers and muleteers to go to Nueva Galicia and destinations further to the north, such as the missions of Texas, which were of great importance to the economy of New Spain. They claimed to have built it with their own resources and that they did not charge travelers any money to use it. However, they claimed that due to the strong currents of the river and the constant rain, it was necessary to rebuild it, and for that they needed the workers who were being forcibly recruited for work in the Guanajuato mines.³⁶ People from the town of Puruándiro also claimed to be involved in another important task that merited their exclusion from the repartimiento. Since they were located along a road that connected the

³⁴ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 204-204v.

³⁵ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 208-208v.

³⁶ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 280.

audiencias of México and Guadalajara, which maintained constant official correspondence with one another, they were responsible for the mail service that passed through their town, and in this way they provided an important service to the Crown.³⁷

Previous Decrees

Several of the towns involved in litigation over the repartimiento possessed decrees, issued by previous viceregal administrations, that exempted them from going to work in the mines. In theory, once a town had such a decree, it was supposed to protect them from new attempts to impose the repartimiento. However, the miners attempted to ignore those decrees and assumed that the one provided to them by the current viceroy would supersede any previous ones. For instance, representatives of Purúandiro presented two decrees from 1757 and 1763 from viceregal authorities that freed them from any obligation to provide workers for repartimiento drafts to the mines. The first one applied to the Guanajuato mines and the second to the nearby mines of Inguarán. When they tried to use the decrees, they were ignored by the authorities in Guanajuato, who demanded that they provide the workers requested of them. The people of Puruándiro raised this issue in their legal struggle; Guevara agreed with them and recommended that the viceroy provide a new decree excluding Puruándiro and its subject towns from the new repartimiento. In their petition, they asked for a fine of two-hundred pesos to be levied on whoever disobeyed this new decree; Guevara requested a fine of five-hundred pesos against the alcalde mayor or any other authority who violated the new decree.³⁸ In a way, Guevara's decision reestablished the validity of pre-existing orders on pending legal cases, since

³⁷ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 278v.

³⁸ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 277-285v.

Guanajuato's authorities had attempted to invalidate them just a few months before, thereby undermining viceregal authority. Guevara was probably well aware of this subversion.

Costumbre

In their legal proceedings most communities appealed to the concept of *costumbre* (custom). The concept was a valid category in the Spanish legal system, often conflicting with and at times even superseding other legislation.³⁹ Normally, local or viceregal authorities determined whether *costumbre* could override existing legislation and decrees, decisions that varied widely across time and place.⁴⁰ Both the New Laws of 1542 and the Recopilación de Leyes of 1680 acknowledged the validity of *costumbre* to be used in deciding cases involving indigenous communities. One law stated:

That with particular attention, the Spanish governors and judges make note of the order and manner of living of the Indians, their government and form of maintenance, and inform the Viceroys or Courts, and respect their good customs [*usos y costumbres*] that are not contradictory to our sacred faith.⁴¹

Lawyers often invoked the legal concept of *costumbre* in cases involving mine workers. For example, when workers in Real del Monte resisted changes to their earnings, their lawyers demanded “let them be compelled to pay the peons, manual laborers, and other laborers the four *reales* that are customary, and not take one away, which is what has been done. That is also just. When there is no other test possible, custom should command...”⁴² Similarly, with the partido,

³⁹ Castro Gutiérrez, “La resistencia al repartimiento,” 255.

⁴⁰ Yanna Yannakakis, *The Art of Being In-between: Native Intermediaries, Indian Identity, and Local Rule in Colonial Oaxaca* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 116-117.

⁴¹ As quoted in Yannakakis, *The Art of Being In-between*, 115.

⁴² Ladd, *Making of a Strike*, 136.

they asked “let the partido of the worker be whatever he can take out from the area assigned him. This is justified by old custom, for which, if Your Excellency deems it necessary, we can give the corresponding justification, as we can for the act of dividing itself.”⁴³ In this way, the workers in Real del Monte made a clear, direct appeal to *costumbre* as a justification to continue to earn four reales per day and to continue receiving their share of the partido.

Thus, established practices, or *costumbre*, were grounds for valid arguments within Spanish law, and communities of Michoacán were aware of the legal concept. For that reason, when they asked for testimony from local religious and secular authorities, one of the first questions they asked was whether, to the knowledge of the witness, it had been customary to send workers from those communities to Guanajuato. For example, the priest don Manuel Antonio de Gecuona testified that indigenous workers in his parish of Pátzcuaro and nearby communities had always lived free of the obligation to go on tandas to the Guanajuato mines. Another priest, don Antonio Gabriel de Madrigal, testified the same for workers in Purenchécuaro, stating that “it has not been customary (*uso, ni costumbre*) for Indians of the town of San Andres Tziróndaro of this district to work in the Guanajuato mines.” Similarly, Antonio Gabriel de Madrigal emphatically claimed that since *tiempo inmemorial* (time immemorial) the communities in his parish had never gone on tandas to Guanajuato, nor any other mining centers. The priests from Pichátaro, Zirahuen, Santa Clara del Cobre, and other towns made similar claims in support of the communities they served.⁴⁴ Don Domingo Antonio de Urrutia, Pátzcuaro’s *regidor capitular*, confirmed the priests’ assertions and added that this

⁴³ Ladd, *Making of a Strike*, 137.

⁴⁴ AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 148, ff. 1-7.

was publicly known and acknowledged by the people of the town (*vecinos y originarios*).⁴⁵ Meanwhile, Mariano Pérez de Tagle, in representing the communities cited above, argued that unless it could be proven otherwise, the fact that it was not an established custom to send workers to Guanajuato was enough to rescind the order decreed by the viceroy in 1777. He stated: “ultimately, the custom that the priests certify is well-established and resists any innovation.”⁴⁶ The fiscal Guevara agreed with this assertion and concluded that “based on the certification that they procured, it proves that it has not been customary for them to do it, and your excellency will be so kind to order that for now there should be no changes, nor should the Indians of the jurisdiction of Pátzcuaro be bothered with the aforementioned repartimientos.”⁴⁷ *Asesor General* Aramburu agreed and Viceroy Bucareli signed the first order excluding the communities around Lake Pátzcuaro from the repartimiento.⁴⁸

Cervantes countered the *costumbre* argument by establishing that, while it was true that not all communities had been going on tandas to the mines, it was nonetheless an established fact that the miners were entitled to use the system, even if they did not always do so. This was significant since, as discussed above, the Guanajuato miners were not only trying to continue utilizing the repartimiento, but were actually looking to expand its use, and now more communities were affected than ever before. Thus, to go from 30 workers a month to between 400 and 500 workers a month, it was clear that many more communities would be affected. To

⁴⁵ AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 148, f. 8v.

⁴⁶ AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 66, f. 119v.

⁴⁷ AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 148, f. 12.

⁴⁸ AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 66, f. 119v.

justify this intensification, the miners argued that they were simply making use of a system that had always existed, even if in a dormant state up until that time.⁴⁹

To prove the established practice of the tandas and the participation of indigenous communities from Michoacán, Cervantes described a type of open-air market system that took place every month-and-a-half or month-and-three-weeks, to coincide with the turns of service of the repartimiento workers from Michoacán. The workers would bring along with them merchandise from their communities that they could sell in the city. During this time, the streets and plazas of Guanajuato would be made available exclusively to them for four days, from Sunday to Wednesday, without any cost and without charging them any type of taxes that other merchants were expected to pay.⁵⁰ In fact, Cervantes stated that some individuals did so well in these fairs that they stayed longer than their turns of service for their own interests, and they could do so without any interference from Guanajuato's authorities. Thus, Cervantes argued that requesting workers from Michoacán was not a new practice, that the existence of the markets prove it was a clearly established *costumbre*; rather the increased number of workers was new, an increase determined by the present needs of the mines.⁵¹

Distance

Distance was another factor that communities used in their cases to argue against repartimiento labor service. As seen in chapter two, some communities, such as Chilchota, had already used distance to the mines to try to exempt themselves from the repartimiento. However,

⁴⁹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 229.

⁵⁰ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 229-229v.

⁵¹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 229v-230.

most communities had focused on negotiating the terms of service—such as duration of the tandas, pay, and treatment—rather than exempting themselves by pointing out that they were far beyond the ten-league limit. In their legal struggle against the re-imposition of the repartimiento, however, all communities cited their distance to the mines as a reason to be exempted.

Erongarícuaro and other communities around Lake Pátzcuaro stated that they were sixty leagues away from the mines and that this alone was enough to exempt them.⁵² They mentioned that in 1752 don Gerónimo de Zuloaga had requested one worker per town in repartimiento for his mine in Inguarán, but had been denied by the viceroy. If that had been the case for a mine that was within their own jurisdiction and only a few leagues away from their communities, they argued, the mines in Guanajuato were many times more distant.⁵³

Mariano Pérez de Tagle not only asked for a decree excluding the towns he represented from the repartimiento due to their distance from the mines, but one that stated that all towns further than ten leagues from the mines were exempted. He also asked for the decree to be sent to all the authorities in the affected communities so that they could apply the law.⁵⁴ Other communities made similar arguments. Uruapan, Tacámbaro, Tingambato, Tiríndaro, and many others stated that the closest mine was forty leagues away, and some were sixty or more leagues away, thus exempting them from the draft.⁵⁵

⁵² AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 148, ff. 10-11v.

⁵³ AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 148, ff. 7v-8.

⁵⁴ AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 66, f. 119v.

⁵⁵ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 21-24, 32v; AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 249v; AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 135v.

Guevara fully agreed with Pérez de Tagles' arguments. He pointed out that, even if it were true that indigenous communities were responsible to provide labor for the mines, it was against the spirit of the law that the repartimiento was applied to communities thirty, forty, fifty and even sixty leagues away from Guanajuato, as was the case with all communities in Michoacán, and at the same time exempt those communities near Guanajuato.⁵⁶ Thus, he suggested what he considered to be the proper way to apply the repartimiento. He argued that the first step would be to recruit workers from communities within the ten leagues established by the legislation, at a four-percent rate, and if that were not enough to satisfy the labor needs of the mines, then it should be extended to twelve, fourteen, or sixteen leagues, based on the need. However, Guevara clarified that if the need were satisfied by recruiting workers within one, two, or three leagues, then it should not be extended beyond that. This approach, he argued, was fully in line with the word and spirit of the law and should be thus applied in Guanajuato.⁵⁷

Cervantes did not deny that the legislation established a ten-league limit, but argued that the law regulating the distance also contemplated the possibility that, in some instances, the distance could be greater. Cervantes claimed that the legislation considered but did not directly address this scenario. He cited a law that allowed workers a day off on certain religious holidays during their journey to a workplace. The law established that workers could be expected to travel five leagues per day. At this rate, the closest communities in Michoacán were eight walking days away from Guanajuato, and the farthest up to twelve days. Only on such long trips would it make

⁵⁶ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 111-111v.

⁵⁷ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 113-114.

sense to have a law requiring the *conductores personeros* to provide workers with days off on religious holidays.⁵⁸

Furthermore, Cervantes argued that the communities of Michoacán--although thirty, forty, fifty, and even sixty leagues away--were actually the closest from which repartimiento workers could be recruited without directly impacting the provisioning of the mining center, and, therefore, its productive capacity. Thus, Cervantes claimed that there were only two options: to bring repartimiento workers and exploit the newly discovered veins, or to end the practice of repartimiento and waste the recently-found wealth. He argued that Guanajuato was located in a highly productive agricultural region, where all of its workers were already fully employed on the region's haciendas, estancias, and community lands.⁵⁹

Cervantes also referred in his arguments to the mines of Potosí. In Potosí, communities from seventeen different provinces were required to provide mita labor, many from places much more distant than those of Michoacán from Guanajuato. He argued that the same laws which governed mita labor in the viceroyalty of Peru should be applied to repartimiento in New Spain.⁶⁰ Cervantes was correct in his assessment of mita labor for Potosí. Some sending Andean communities were located as far as 200 leagues (500 miles) away from the mining center, a trip requiring up to two months. However, Cervantes neglected to mention the significant economic and demographic differences between the Andes and New Spain, which made the justification of the mita more palatable—at least from a legal perspective—to viceregal authorities than the

⁵⁸ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 233v-234.

⁵⁹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 230v.

⁶⁰ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 234. Gavira Márquez states that “it was very convenient to allude to the Potosí mita as an example since that institution did not have the distance limit and it was much bigger.” Gavira Márquez, *Minería y población*, 39.

repartimiento.⁶¹ Finally, Cervantes claimed that the distance was not that far, that it did not seem too long when they traveled to Guanajuato to sell their merchandise, but only when they were required to go on tandas.⁶²

Pay for Travel Days

Closely associated with the problem of distance to the mines was the fact that miners were obligated to pay for the days that it took workers to travel to the mines and back to their communities. However, all the communities involved claimed that they were not properly compensated for those days. For instance, people from Erongarícuaro and other communities around Lake Pátzcuaro argued that while the law allowed for indigenous workers to be sent from their communities, it also stipulated that they were to be paid for travel to and from the mines, but the Guanajuato miners were not paying the workers for those days, but were paying them only for the time they spent working in the mines.⁶³ Witnesses from Tingüindín testified that it took them a total of twelve days to travel by foot sixty leagues to Guanajuato, but for all this walking they got nothing; they received only 1 peso on their return, which was not enough to cover all the expenses of the trip, and thus workers suffered hunger and their families were left with no money to cover their needs. They asked the viceroy to order the miners to pay workers 2 reales for each of the twelve days it took to get to the mines and the twelve that it took to return

⁶¹ Brading and Cross, “Colonial Silver Mining,” 558-560; Povea Moreno, “Coacción y disención,” 3; Garner, “Long-Term Mining Trends,” 906, 926. There was a very important difference with the two systems that made the comparison of distances problematic. Mita workers went to the mines on a yearly rotational service and the repartimiento workers on turns of six weeks. Making the long trip once a year was different than making eight shorter, but still long, trips per year. I’m not arguing here that the long-term stay made the distance less onerous, I’m just saying that it was not a direct comparison, as Cervantes was implying.

⁶² AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 234v-235.

⁶³ AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 66, Exp. 80, f. 119.

to their communities, for a total of 48 reales, or 6 pesos.⁶⁴ Tingüindín's alcalde mayor, Juan José Carrillo, warned Guanajuato's alcalde mayor that unless workers from Tingüindín were properly compensated for the days that they had traveled to the mines, he would not allow the next group of repartimiento workers to go to the mines. The viceregal authorities agreed and ordered Guanajuato's alcalde mayor to ensure that the workers were paid for the days that they had to travel to the mines in person and in cash (*en tabla y mano propia*) by the *sacagentes* before they left their communities. The same was to be done on their return trip.⁶⁵

The miners rejected the conclusion reached by the viceregal authorities. Cervantes stated that it was not feasible to pay the workers for the days of travel since the distance was so long that it would be too expensive for the miners to pay. If compensated for travel time, the miners would have to pay the closest communities a total of sixteen "useless" days, and twenty-four to the most distant ones. This compensation, Cervantes argued, would lead miners to abandon their enterprises. Rather, he proposed that indigenous communities should take into consideration the open-air markets made available exclusively to them in Guanajuato, where they could make up the difference of what they did not get from the travel time by selling products from their communities.⁶⁶ He argued that indigenous workers made as much money, if not more, from the markets as they would if they were paid daily wages for travel. Also, he claimed that the established five leagues per day was a reasonable rate of travel for workers, but Cervantes clarified that they must be understood as the "common" kind, not the kind that indigenous

⁶⁴ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 212v-213.

⁶⁵ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 218-218v.

⁶⁶ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 235.

workers could travel, given their physical disposition.⁶⁷ It is unclear what he meant by this, but very likely he was arguing that they were capable of walking faster, and therefore they could be expected to travel more than just those five leagues per day.

Change in Climate

The discussion of distance from the mines led to another common complaint from communities: that the repartimiento forced people to go into a region where the climate was very different. In this period, exposure to a different climate was widely considered the cause of disease. People from Erongarícuaro argued that even if they had to travel ten leagues, there would be a difference in climate; the fact that they were sixty leagues away from Guanajuato made it even more likely that the climate would change dramatically along the way. Legislation dealing with this topic prohibited moving workers from one climate type to another extreme. Furthermore, they claimed that there was no hospital in Guanajuato for them to be treated if they fell ill, again something that the legislation stipulated.⁶⁸ People from Uruapan claimed that the climate in Guanajuato was extremely cold, and that their community was very hot, and that the change of climate was bad for the workers' health. To prove their point, they mentioned that in their community they grew sugar cane and bananas, something that was only possible in very hot

⁶⁷ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 240-240v.

⁶⁸ AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 66, Exp. 80, ff. 119-119v. However, it is unclear whether it was true that there was no hospital for them in Guanajuato. In 1767, during the riots that took place in the city, some workers specifically mentioned the Tarascan hospital as a place where they went to hide during the violence. AHMG, Militar, 1767, Caja 1, Exp. 4, f. 167v.

lands.⁶⁹ Tacámbaro similarly claimed that their hot climate and the cold climate of Guanajuato had led to their workers returning sick from the mines.⁷⁰

In response to these claims, Cervantes simply stated that the indigenous communities had no reason to complain since Guanajuato possessed a good, mild, and moderate climate. While some communities of Michoacán were located in a very cold zone, such as those of the Sierra Tarasca, others were in a very hot climate, such as those close to the Tierra Caliente of the south, such as Uruapan and Tacámbaro. Cervantes claimed that people from either should not be concerned, since Guanajuato's climate was perfectly balanced, that it was neither too hot nor too cold. Besides, he argued that if communities complained of changes in the climate to be excluded from providing service to the mines, they did not seem to have the same problem of adjusting to the climate when they went to the city to sell their merchandise, which they did both during their turns of service and on their own initiative.⁷¹

On the Lack of Workers

Guanajuato miners cited an urgent need for workers as their main justification for the need for repartimiento labor. They claimed that there were not enough workers to sustain the mining industry in Guanajuato, and that it was in imminent danger of collapsing. However, most communities in Michoacán asserted that it was not true. Representatives from Erongarícuaro and other towns around Lake Pátzcuaro stated that there were many towns near Guanajuato from which the miners could recruit workers. Also, they claimed that even if the mining center were

⁶⁹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 30v.

⁷⁰ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 250.

⁷¹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 235-235v.

very productive, not all its mines were in production, nor were all very rich. Thus, the miners had more than enough people to work the mines by drawing on the labor pool near the mining center.⁷² Similarly, those of Puruándiro and Uruapan asserted that between Guanajuato and their communities there were many other towns in various jurisdictions that could provide workers.⁷³ Similarly, Erongarícuaro pointed out that it was only customary to recruit workers from towns nearby Guanajuato, since they had the necessary skills to work the mines and were accustomed to its climate.⁷⁴

Guevara agreed with this assessment. He explained that the legislation had allowed for repartimiento when it was necessary to compensate for low populations in the mining centers. One goal of the legislation had been to populate the mining centers and to found towns around them to make sure that they could be properly provisioned, both with people and goods. Since it was widely documented that that process had been successfully carried out in Guanajuato over the preceding two centuries, it seemed unjustified to bring workers from as far away as Michoacán to go to the Guanajuato mines. He argued that it was a better alternative simply to recruit from those places that were closer to Guanajuato, since the change in climate was not as severe as it was with the communities in Michoacán, and those living closer to Guanajuato were familiar with the mining industry and would therefore not be scared by this type of work, as was the case with those from Michoacán.⁷⁵

⁷² AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 66, Exp. 80, f. 119v.

⁷³ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 282v; AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 23v.

⁷⁴ AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 148, f. 7.

⁷⁵ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 112-113.

If a lack of workers was not the reason for the Guanajuato miners' mission to enlist repartimiento workers, then why did they think it was so necessary? People from Erongaricuro claimed that the real reason that the Guanajuato miners were forcibly recruiting workers from their community was because the work was so difficult and dangerous that free wage workers would not voluntarily risk their lives in such onerous tasks.⁷⁶ People from Tiríndaro argued that while the miners alleged that they needed to forcibly recruit workers due to a shortage of labor, the reasons were actually more sinister. As evidence, they referred to the fact that workers could pay a certain amount of money to be liberated from their obligation to work in the mines. Thus, people of Tiríndaro asked: if they really needed workers, why would the miners would be willing to accept a cash payment to excuse the workers? The answer was that they did not really need the workers, but were rather interested in extorting money from them. They claimed that the *justicia mayor*, don Nicolás Valdés, who was also the repartimiento judge, received money from the workers, and then would give it to the *alcalde mayor*. The practice turned out to be a lucrative source of income for several Spanish officials.⁷⁷

These accusations were confirmed by other communities, such as those in the jurisdiction of Tingüindín, which also claimed that they paid money to be exempted from working in the mines. They said: “from this it can be concluded that there is no lack of men to work in them.”⁷⁸ Tingüindín’s *alcalde mayor*, Miguel de Deza, argued that the fact that the mine owners were not paying the repartimiento workers properly suggested that they were not really suffering the need that they claimed. He reasoned that if they really needed the workers they would be willing to

⁷⁶ AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 148, f. 7v.

⁷⁷ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 127v.

⁷⁸ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 84v.

pay workers more, not less, to motivate them to continue working at the mines. Furthermore, he concluded that if Guanajuato's authorities were willing to accept a cash payment from workers to be exempted from working in the mines, then the truth of the matter was that workers from his *alcaldía mayor* were, in fact, subsidizing the labor force for the mines.⁷⁹

Similarly, Guevara offered an explanation that contradicted the miners and suggested economic factors as the reason for a lack of workers. He acknowledged that there was indeed a shortage of labor in Guanajuato, but he claimed that it was due mainly to the fact that the miners had taken away the *partido*, and not the other reasons cited by the miners. He explained that *partido* incentive had kept the mining center well populated in the past, when there were many workers to satisfy the needs of all mines and smelting plants, but that its suppression had led to the mining center's current predicament.⁸⁰

Cervantes had a different view of the role that the *partido* played in the mining industry. He argued that it was true that it often served to motivate some workers, but it was not a general rule. First, if the mines were not in a boom period, workers would not benefit from the *partido*; second, if the mines were in a boom period, their *tequios* (production quota) would consume most of their time, leaving them little or no time to produce any *partido* at all. Also, he argued that the *partido* was not good for the mining industry, since in boom times workers flooded into the mining centers, but as soon as the boom turned to bust, they would flee, leaving behind a desolate place. Cervantes claimed that this was the reason why several mining centers that had been well populated in the past were now completely desolated and ruined. Ultimately,

⁷⁹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 88-89v.

⁸⁰ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 110v-111.

Cervantes argued that the partido was prejudicial to the workers and claimed that “there is no worse enemy of the mining industry than to treat workers with liberality.”⁸¹

Damage to Indigenous Communities

The communities that were included in the new repartimiento often cited the damage caused by the repartimiento on their communities as a reason to be excluded from this imposition. Colonial legislation clearly established limits when dealing with indigenous communities and, above all, emphasized the importance of keeping them populated.⁸² With so much unrest caused by the tandas, many communities were significantly impacted. For instance, Chucándiro's leaders claimed that the service provided by workers from their community had led to the deterioration of households due to the absence and, often, death of the workers. Also, they claimed that whole families were simply leaving the town out of fear of being forced to go to the mines, losing all connections to the community. This exodus led to a loss of income from tribute, as these families would move to towns where they were not subject to either tribute nor repartimiento responsibilities.⁸³ Similarly, those of Indaparapeo stated that as more tandas were completed, the town was slowly being populated by men who were overworked, sick, and disabled, making it very difficult to tend to their community lands, to provide for their priest's sustenance, and to collect tribute.⁸⁴

⁸¹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 244-244v.

⁸² AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 183.

⁸³ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 204.

⁸⁴ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 182v.

Tingüindín provided a more specific example of how workers were reacting to the repartimiento and its impact on their community. Tingüindín and its four subject towns—Pamatacuaro, Sicuicho, Atapán, and Tacascuaro—were initially asked to provide a total of thirty workers for the mines. However, the *alcalde mayor*, don Miguel de Deza, ended up only sending thirteen, given his many reservations about the imposition of this institution on his jurisdiction. The indigenous authorities of Tingüindín had complied by sending the thirteen workers, but claimed that it had led to very serious harm to the towns mentioned. They stated that several workers had died of diseases contracted due to the excessive work, high humidity, toxic fumes, and extreme heat experienced in the mines. This had led several families to run away rather than stay and be faced with the possibility of going back to the mines; some even went to nearby unpopulated areas, where they faced several dangers. For example, they mentioned that a couple from the community of Sicuicho had decided to run away to a nearby hill so that the man did not have to serve his *tanda*. However, the couple died only a few weeks later, presumably of starvation, and their bodies were found where they had been hiding.⁸⁵

Some communities in Michoacán provided a specific number of workers who had run away to avoid their turn of service. For instance, don Manuel Francisco de Cuesta y Río, Tarecuato's priest, testified that sixty-six workers had decided to run away. Some had taken their families with them, but others had simply abandoned them.⁸⁶ Similarly, don Francisco Xavier de Gaona, priest in the jurisdiction of Tingüindín, named a total of twenty-one workers from the

⁸⁵ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 212v.

⁸⁶ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 175.

community of Pamatácuaro that had run away either to other towns or simply to the nearby hills (see table 4.1).⁸⁷

We see a similar situation in Tiríndaro, where workers fled the town to avoid being forced to go to the mines. The workers' aversion to the mines often led them to pay their way out of this obligation, but those who could not afford to pay left the town and settled in nearby haciendas. Tiríndaro's indigenous authorities stated that many men considered it better to "enslave" themselves to the nearby haciendas and leave behind their houses, wives, and children,

Table 4.3: Indigenous Workers from Pamatácuaro that Ran Away to Avade Repartimiento, November 1778

	Worker's Name	Wife's Name
1	Gabriel Juan	Rosa
2	Juan Bernabé	María
3	Salvador Bernabé	María
4	Pedro Miguel	María
5	Juan Nicolás Bernabé	Widowed with kids
6	Sebastián Bautista	Sebastiana
7	Nicolás Bernabé	Widowed
8	Juan Gabriel	Antonia
9	Juan Pedro	Magdalena María
10	Antonio Pascual	Magdalena
11	Juan Lorenzo	María Antonia
12	Miguel Gerónimo	Josefa
13	Juan Antonio	Catarina
14	Mateo José	Widowed
15	Juan Mateo	Nicolasa
16	José Antonio	María Antonia
17	Simón Marcos	Antonia
18	Diego Gabriel	Cecilia
19	Juan Tecari	Inés
20	Diego Onchi	Juana
21	Diego Ignacio	Widowed

Source: AGN, Minería, Vol. 148, ff. 177-177v.

⁸⁷ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 177-177v.

than to face the possibility of going to the mines and return maimed for life. They considered this a necessary evil since they could find no other solution to what they called an “oppression.” They said if this trend continued, their town would eventually be completely deserted since most workers were simply too afraid to go to the mines. The fact that this flight led to a decrease in tributes collected meant that the Crown was being defrauded in the process.⁸⁸

On the damage caused to indigenous communities, Guevara noticed a contradiction in the miners’ arguments. Whereas indigenous communities in Michoacán had complained that taking men away from their communities had caused them great damage—leading to a neglect of their lands, hospitals, churches, roads, payment of tributes, etc.—the miners had argued that the number of workers taken from them was so low that no major damage could be caused. However, when asked why they could not recruit workers from communities near Guanajuato, the miners had argued that that was not possible since they were busy working in haciendas that provisioned the mining center, and that taking workers away from those enterprises would negatively impact the mining industry. The fiscal deduced that if no damage could result from distant communities sending low numbers of workers, then no damage could result in communities that were closer to Guanajuato, according to the same line of reasoning.⁸⁹

Collecting Tribute

One of the main arguments used by the Guanajuato miners in support of the repartimiento system was that it generated income for the royal coffers. This claim was substantiated in two

⁸⁸ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 128.

⁸⁹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 111v-112.

ways. First, the miners paid taxes to the Crown based on the amount of ore extracted from the mines. Second, the workers earned money from their work, which they used to pay tribute to the Crown. Guevara turned this argument around to argue against the use of repartimiento. He used the case of Tingüindín as an example of communities that had been depopulated by the fear of workers of being recruited to work in the mines. This depopulation had made it impossible for indigenous authorities to collect the necessary tribute payments. Furthermore, Guevara argued that if workers ran away from their communities to prevent being recruited, nobody benefited. Ironically, the repartimiento scared workers away from the mines instead of getting more to go to the mines—even those who considered going of their own free will.⁹⁰

In their legal struggles against the new repartimiento, the communities of Michoacán also referred to the difficulties of collecting tribute. It was only logical that communities would invoke crown tribute payments, a common colonial strategy of appealing to the interests of the king. One concern was that when workers left the town those that stayed had to pay the other workers' share of the tribute, leading to significant strains on the community and even forcing others to leave the town rather than pay the extra money. Antonio Rafael, Indaparapeo's indigenous governor, claimed that he was responsible to pay the full amount of the tribute, even when several men had left the town. Thus, he and others had to pay more than their share of the tribute, something which many could not afford to do, given their poverty. In fact, he stated that he was responsible for collecting tribute from those who either ran away to nearby haciendas or stayed in the mines, but doing so was more expensive than the amount of money that he would collect, thus making it impractical.⁹¹

⁹⁰ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 118-119.

⁹¹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 182v.

Economic Exploitation: Suppression of Wages

The Guanajuato miners argued that the reason that they sought a re-imposition of the repartimiento—often in towns that had never been subject to this draft before—was because of a desperate need for workers due to events that were beyond their control. But many indigenous people suspected that the miners had more nefarious intentions. Lorenzo Zacarías, Tiríndaro’s governor, stated in the following unequivocal terms: “Since many years ago we have been compelled to go to Guanajuato to serve in the mines through tandas. Even though it has been alleged that the compulsion is due to a lack of workers for the mines, at bottom, as we intend to prove, there have been other objectives.”⁹²

Towns in Michoacán, as well as many other indigenous and Spanish authorities, suspected that economic factors, rather than a need for labor, was driving the miners' demand for repartimiento workers. There were two ways that miners and Spanish authorities were benefitting economically from the repartimiento workers. First, the miners paid repartimiento workers low wages, and they cheated workers of benefits mandated by law. Second, workers were extorted to pay Spaniards instead of serving in the mines. While paying for exemption was optional, and workers could simply serve in the mines instead of paying, the working conditions and treatment from the authorities and mine administrators made mining labor as a *tantzita* a highly undesirable occupation. The miners clearly benefited from the exploitation of workers with low wages, while the extortion of money to exempt workers from the draft benefitted Spanish authorities in Guanajuato who administered the repartimiento. Thus, in essence, as Tandeter has demonstrated for Potosí in the same time period, the new repartimiento, much like the Andean mita, was a

⁹² AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 127.

form of subsidy for the miners and a type of taxation for indigenous communities.⁹³ However, miners and authorities were often one and the same person, or belonged to the same families and/or elite groups that worked closely together for their mutual benefit. The communities in Michoacán recognized this very early on and fought hard against the re-imposition of the repartimiento.

The difference between what a free wage worker and a repartimiento worker could make was very significant. A free wage worker performing manual labor—which is what a *tantzita* was expected to do—earned between 2 and 4 reales per day, although 4 reales a day seems to have been the standard.⁹⁴ For example, in Real del Monte in 1766, the workers requested that the wage be kept at 4 reales per day for all peons, manual laborers, and all other non-specialized workers.⁹⁵ But even this provision was often not considered enough, especially given the harsh nature of the work. The lawyer representing the workers of the Veta Vizcaína mines in Real del Monte described the situation of the workers in the following way: “It is frightening to read the phrases that authors use to express the terrors of this work: the continual risks of losing one’s life, smothered in a landfall, plunged down an abyss, breathing noxious fumes, contracting pestilential diseases; all of which, added to the nature of the work itself, commends labor enough; four *reales* is little reward for it.”⁹⁶

⁹³ Enrique Tandeter, “Forced and Free Labour in Late Colonial Potosí,” *Past and Present* 93-1 (1981): 99.

⁹⁴ Brading, *Merchants and Miners*, 277, 290; Garner, “Long-Term Mining Trends,” 929; Ladd, *The Making of a Strike*, 15.

⁹⁵ Ladd, *Making of a Strike*, 136.

⁹⁶ Ladd, *Making of a Strike*, 136.

For mine workers, especially specialized workers such as barrenadores and barreteros, the partido, their share of the ore produced in the mine, was even more important than their daily wage. The barreteros of Real del Monte asserted:

Being pikemen, we have been working these mines for many years with excessive toil and fatigue, in exchange for the only protection a pikemen has in a mine—the partido he may carry away from the daily task, which is and has been the only thing that permits miners to live in decency—not the wage, for that four *reales* can be spent in a day or a night inside the mine itself in eating and fortifying oneself against the toil and dampness of the mine.⁹⁷

Garner states that the partido could earn a worker two or three times his wage, which could amount to 8 to 12 reales more per day.⁹⁸ Thus, Brading and Cross are justified in claiming that workers earned more from the partido than from their daily wages of 4 reales.⁹⁹ Income from the partido made it possible for some workers to work only three or four shifts a week, rather than the usual six days, and still make a reasonable wage.¹⁰⁰ However, not all workers received the partido,¹⁰¹ and the amount of partido that workers received varied from one mining center to another.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Ladd, *Making of a Strike*, 129.

⁹⁸ Garner, “Long-Term Mining Trends,” 929.

⁹⁹ Brading and Cross, “Colonial Silver Mining,” 558.

¹⁰⁰ Ladd, *Making of a Strike*, 17.

¹⁰¹ Although it is likely that manual laborers were not officially included in the partido in many places, there is some evidence to suggest that they may have nonetheless benefitted from the system. In Real del Monte, workers asked: “Finally, let the poor worker who, either from fatigue from the task or for some other reason, could not gather a partido, let him keep the ore his companions gave him, let it not be taken away. Rather, after dividing with the boss, let him carry his half away.” Ladd, *Making of a Strike*, 135.

¹⁰² Garner, “Long-Term Mining Trends,” 929. According to Ladd, the only two mining centers in New Spain in 1766 to not distribute partidos were Taxco and Zimapán, but by that time many miners were considering getting rid of this practice, which is precisely what led to the disruptions in Real del Monte in that year. Ladd, *Making of a Strike*, 14. That was the case in Guanajuato where Manuel Jiménez, manager of the Rayas mine, abolished the partido in this mine in 1774 and José Quijano, manager of the Valenciana mine, did the same in 1790. Brading, *Merchants and Miners*, 277, 288.

In this context, it is easy to see why a repartimiento worker would resent his wages. A repartimiento worker would only get paid 1.5 reales per day, which is about half as much as a free wage worker doing the same job could expect to receive. Eugenio Martínez, resident of Indaparapeo, testified that six workers from his town had been compelled to go to Guanajuato on tandas “for the small salary of 1.5 reales per day, in a far away land, doing a grueling job, and on top of everything they are mistreated.”¹⁰³ Furthermore, repartimiento workers could not expect to participate in the partido. Besides their wage of 1.5 reales per day, workers would also get some food and money for their return trip, but not enough to cover the amount required by law. In his reply, Guevara stated that workers should be paid the same that a free wage worker would receive for doing the same job, plus compensation for their days of travel to and from their communities, traveling five leagues per day. This was not good news for the miners. In part, an important economic incentive for the miners to continue using the repartimiento was paying repartimiento workers much lower wages than what they had to pay free wage workers.¹⁰⁴

Cervantes countered this assertion by stating that the workers were either lying or were simply ignorant of the full remuneration that they received from the miners. This included their daily wage of 1.5 reales, but also included Sundays, as well as a ration of 1.5 *almudes* of corn per week, 3 reales of food per week, 1 peso per worker paid to a cook for the six-week tanda, and 1 peso that the worker received for his trip back home. In total, for the forty-two days that a worker spent in the mining center, he received a total of 11 pesos, 7 reales, 3 cuartillas, with corn and cook included. This, Cervantes argued, meant that the workers often went back to their

¹⁰³ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 188.

¹⁰⁴ Gavira Márquez concluded that “just like with the forced labor for the Potosí mines, this labor force was not paid in a form that would guarantee its reproduction, it was supposed that they had to have personal or community resources that would support the worker and his family.” Gavira Márquez, *Minería y población*, 48.

communities with more money than they would have earned had they worked in nearby haciendas, where rations of corn were not included nor were they paid for Sundays. For the miners, each repartimiento worker ended up costing 14 pesos and 3 cuartillas in total, including fees paid to the escribano and others.¹⁰⁵ This figure meant that the worker received more than 2 reales per day, but still not the 4 reales that a free wage worker could expect to earn.

Besides the complaint of low wages—and often lack of payment—owners also withheld workers' salaries for unjustified reasons. In their legal proceedings communities often mentioned that miners kept money owed to workers, supposedly for tribute payments. Guevara categorically prohibited this practice, and urged a most severe punishment for the retention of any money by the miners for tribute payment, since the repartimiento workers belonged to communities where their *principales* already collected the necessary money. On this and other abuses committed against the workers, Guevara asked for a thorough investigation into this matter, and punishment for those responsible.¹⁰⁶ In his reply, Cervantes stated that no such abuses had come to the attention of the Diputación de Minería, but if such cases did come to their attention, they would be dealt with the most severe punishment possible to prevent further abuses from occurring. But he argued that this accusation should not be a justification to abolish the repartimiento system since, overall, it worked well and included many protections for workers. Indigenous and Spanish authorities could work together to address abuses against workers, including the wrongful assessment of tribute payment.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 236.

¹⁰⁶ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 114-118.

¹⁰⁷ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 237-237v.

Economic Exploitation: Extortion

Miners also exploited workers and their communities through extortion. Individual workers could arrange to pay to be exempted from serving their turn of service. Many workers preferred this option to risking their lives and health in the mines. The amount of money that workers were expected to pay differed from town to town, and changed over time, usually increasing rather than decreasing. For instance, the community of Puruándiro claimed that on two tandas to the mines, the workers chose to hire a worker in Guanajuato to do the work for them at a cost of 9 pesos.¹⁰⁸ Since the workers received a total of about 8 pesos per tanda, assuming that miners paid them the standard wage, this example suggests that the workers paid more money for their replacement than they received for the job in the first place.

Tiríndaro's authorities claimed that the six workers from their community who were required to go to Guanajuato at first paid 1 pesos and 3 reales to be exempted from the service. Then, the fee went up to 3 pesos and 2 reales each. Then, by the beginning of 1777, the price started to escalate quickly. First, it went up to 4 pesos, then 6 pesos, then 6 pesos and 2 reales, then 7 pesos and 6 reales, until it reached 13 pesos by May 1778. At the same time, Tiríndaro was compelled to send twelve workers, instead of the six that they had previously sent. Based on those numbers, the community of Tiríndaro would have been responsible to pay 156 pesos in total to exempt its workers from the draft.¹⁰⁹ This sum was an exorbitant amount in this period, especially for indigenous people, and for that reason Tiríndaro felt justified in fighting the imposition of the new repartimiento.

¹⁰⁸ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 284v.

¹⁰⁹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 127-127v.

Tirindaro's governor, Lorenzo Zacarías, argued that Guanajuato's *alcalde mayor* profited from this arrangement. He described how an indigenous man was assigned to collect the money, who would turn the money over to don Nicolás Valdés, the *repartimiento* judge, and then both would go together to deliver the money to the *alcalde mayor*. When the indigenous man asked for a receipt, the *alcalde mayor* would decline to give it to him, thus making the transaction untraceable. In reference to how the *repartimiento* was used by the *alcalde mayor* to make money, Zacarías exclaimed: "we do not find any reasonable explanation to justify this unbearable imposition."¹¹⁰

Although workers could make these arrangements individually, their decisions had an impact on the entire community. Tandeter argues that the Potosí *mita* of the late eighteenth century did not only exploit individual workers, but also the entire community to which the worker belonged.¹¹¹ In the Andes, indigenous communities could either hire a substitute worker or could pay the miners directly; either way they ended up subsidizing labor costs without a share in any of the miners' profits.¹¹² Instead of using *repartimiento* workers in their own mines, many miners rented laborers to other people. Garner states that "for the seller, trading in *mitayos* could bring more profit than operating the mine or refinery to which the *mitayos* were assigned."¹¹³ *Mitayos* were paid between 2.5 and 3.5 reales per day, but they could be rented for much more in the free market, and the holder of the *mitayos* would keep the difference. Viceregal authorities estimated that one *mitayo* could generate as much as 235 pesos a year to the original

¹¹⁰ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 127v-128.

¹¹¹ Tandeter, "Forced and Free Labour," 99.

¹¹² Garner, "Long-Term Mining Trends," 925.

¹¹³ Garner, "Long-Term Mining Trends," 925.

holders of the mita, which could add up to as much as a half-million pesos for all the mitayos in one year. For example, in 1659 a royal inquiry found that a total of 580,000 pesos had been paid for workers to be excluded from the mita labor draft in that year.¹¹⁴ This sum represented a direct transfer of wealth from indigenous communities to miners.

Such was the case with the new repartimiento in Michoacán. Zacarías described in eloquent terms how the 156 pesos that they were obligated to pay in the upcoming tanda would be paid with “unhappiness and misery.”¹¹⁵ He suggested that the burden fell on the entire community. He asked how Tiríndaro was expected to pay this great sum of money when the town did not even possess the six-hundred varas of land measured from the town center, the *fundo legal*, that other communities enjoyed, and from which they derived income. He stated that with the new imposition they would not be able to pay their tributes, nor fulfill their religious obligations to support their priests, or to fix their church.¹¹⁶ Thus, the whole community was affected by the repartimiento, not just individual workers who were subject to the draft.

Similarly, Tingambato, Taretan, Ziracuaretiro, and Zurumucapio argued that their workers were being exploited and that the whole community suffered. They claimed that each of these towns paid 7 pesos per worker to the *conductor personero* to be relieved of their responsibility to provide workers to Guanajuato. However, most of these small communities, with only a few tributaries and few sources of income, could produce this amount. For example, Taretan and Ziracuaretiro claimed that the only source of income for their communities were some small

¹¹⁴ Garner, “Long-Term Mining Trends,” 925.

¹¹⁵ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 127v. The text reads: “Compeliéndonos nuevamente ha que hemos de dar doce indios, ciento cincuenta y seis pesos se han de sacar en esta inmediata venidera tanda de nuestra infelicidad y miseria.”

¹¹⁶ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 127v.

banana plantations.¹¹⁷ Their priest, Melchor José de Esparza, confirmed their claim, and affirmed that both towns were very poor and lacked the community lands that they were supposed to possess by law, making it very difficult for them to fulfill all their obligations. He concluded his assessment by stating: “In virtue of this, I find that they are seriously harmed by being forced to work in the mines and goes against your majesty’s intentions...who orders not to send them, the more so when their misfortune is greater.”¹¹⁸ Thus, more than an individual misfortune, the repartimiento was seen as a scourge on the whole community.

Other towns in Michoacán were also required to pay for exemptions from sending workers to Guanajuato. Numarán, for example, paid 6, 8, and sometimes 11 pesos per worker.¹¹⁹ Don José Vicente Ramos, a twenty-nine-year-old Spanish resident of Numarán, testified that a worker called Gerónimo had sold him a ramrod to complete the full 6 pesos that he needed to pay, and clarified that others had paid even more. Furthermore, he stated that he needed to lend money to other workers so that they could pay their tribute, which the workers had paid back with much difficulty and by getting other loans.¹²⁰ Don José Paulo Landeros, a twenty-eight year-old Spanish resident of Numarán, testified that since the workers were so poor, he and other residents of the town had to lend them money to help them meet their obligations, including paying their tribute and hiring workers to replace them at the mines.¹²¹ Don Pedro Lisalde y Abarca, a forty year-old Spanish witness, stated that the workers in Numarán had paid a total of

¹¹⁷ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 31.

¹¹⁸ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 29.

¹¹⁹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 76v.

¹²⁰ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 78-78v.

¹²¹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 81.

12 pesos to be exempted from the *tanda*, and that they had asked him for a porter to take the money to Guanajuato. He had complied and provided the porter, who had taken the money as requested. However, once in the mining center, he was told that the miners had not been able to get replacement workers for the 12 pesos he had given them and they were now asking for 10 pesos more.¹²² These witnesses' accounts provide a clear picture of the exploitative system that the new repartimiento represented. Workers were being asked to provide money to be exempted from the *tandas*, and the amount that the miners requested significantly increased over time, creating hardships for the workers and their communities.

Authorities in Guanajuato were confronted with this information and asked to justify their actions. Don Antonio de Obregón y Alcocer, soon to become Conde de la Valenciana, was then *alcalde mayor* of Guanajuato.¹²³ He categorically denied everything that the communities of Michoacán claimed, and emphasized that neither he, nor his predecessor, don Juan Montero de Espinosa, had ever been involved in the type of extortions that the workers claimed.¹²⁴ To support his assertion, Obregón y Alcocer asked for the testimony of the city's *escribano real*, don Manuel María Marquina, who had occupied this post since 1771 and had worked under different *alcaldes mayores*—including don Baltasar Berzaval, don Juan Montero de Espinosa, and don

¹²² AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 81v.

¹²³ Antonio de Obregón y Alcocer was one of the owners of the Valenciana mine in Guanajuato. He acquired this mine in 1760, but for nine years it produced little profit. However, after 1769 the output of silver increased significantly and by 1774 it had surpassed that of the Rayas mine and eventually became the most productive silver mine in the world. This made Obregón y Alcocer an extremely wealthy and influential man. Once he was well recognized, he had a very active political career, taking the positions of town councilor, municipal magistrate, interim *alcalde mayor*, and, in 1780, Conde de la Valenciana. Brading, *Merchants and Miners*, 278, 308; Margarita Villalba Bustamante, "Economía y sociedad de un pueblo minero: La Valenciana, 1760-1810" (Master's thesis, UNAM, 1999), 90; Enrique Canudas Sandoval, *Las venas de plata en la historia de México. Síntesis de Historia Económica Siglo XIX*, vol. 3, (Villahermosa and Mexico City: Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco, Editorial Utopía, 2005), 1634.

¹²⁴ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 148.

Antonio de Obregón y Alcocer. Also, Marquina was in charge of administering the repartimiento of workers to the mines in the Guanajuato mining center, and was thus aware of how the system functioned before and after the attempted expansion of the system in 1777. Marquina stated in no uncertain terms that “never, for any reason, cause, or motive, have [the *alcaldes mayores*] charged even half a real to the Indians for those men who, once already assigned to work in the mines, do not appear in person to fulfill their obligation.”¹²⁵ He explained that in a recent *tanda* the *papite* (indigenous man assigned to lead the workers to the mines) had offered Obregón y Alcocer 15 pesos to exempt workers from his community from their responsibility to work in the mines. Obregón y Alcocer had rejected the offer and returned the money to the *papite*, strongly reprimanding him and stating: “what we need here is people, not money.”¹²⁶

In another incident, Marquina explained that a *recaudador* (person in charge of gathering the workers once in the mining center), called Manuel Álvarez, had charged workers from Uruapan 20 pesos for not having been present for the previous *tanda*. The money was given to Marquina and he immediately told Obregón y Alcocer about it, who without hesitation ordered Marquina to return the money to Manuel and to reprimand him for having taken it. Manuel was then told to return the money to the *papite* from Uruapan, who was supposed to give it to Uruapan’s *teniente* or Pátzcuaro’s *alcalde mayor* so that he could return the money to the workers that had made the payment, for which the *teniente* or *alcalde mayor* was to provide a receipt that would be taken back to Obregón y Alcocer to verify that the money had made it back to its rightful owners.¹²⁷ This scenario diverges from the one described by many witnesses—

¹²⁵ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 149.

¹²⁶ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 149v.

¹²⁷ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 149v-150.

including Spanish authorities—back in Michoacán. With these examples, Marquina stated that far from causing all the damage that the workers claimed, Obregón y Alcocer was attentive to provide them with the help they needed and to prevent any danger in their workplaces. For instance, he mentioned that he had not authorized even one repartimiento worker for a mine called El Señor de Burgos, even though the owners had insistently asked for workers, since the entrance to the mine was too dangerous and he did not want the workers to be exposed to that danger.¹²⁸

If it were not the case that Guanajuato's alcalde mayor was exploiting the workers, then who was? Indigenous communities had provided ample evidence to support the claim that they were paying money to be relieved of their responsibility to work at the mines. Witnesses from all groups in Michoacán testified that this was a well-known, established practice. Thus, the burden of explanation fell on Guanajuato's authorities. Marquina, in his testimony, offered a possible explanation. He argued that workers from Michoacán who did not want to serve their tandas paid the papites to be exempted. The papites took the money and hired workers to replace them. The hired workers, instead of working the time that they were supposed to, would simply run away, causing great harm to the miners. So, according to Marquina, it was the papites who were creating the problem both for workers and for miners. In fact, Marquina mentioned that in one of the most recent tandas he had learned that papites were engaging in these type of transactions, and that he had taken immediate action to address the situation. Namely, he gathered the papites and recaudadores and cautioned them never, under any circumstances, to take payments from

¹²⁸ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 150.

repartimiento workers to hire replacements. They were instructed to accompany those who were assigned to go from each town for that specific tanda.¹²⁹

Marquina then addressed the claim that the alcalde mayor and possibly other functionaries in Guanajuato were benefitting from extorting workers. He argued that, in fact, the alcalde mayor, the escribano, and the recaudadores did get paid, but the money came from the miners, not the workers. The miners were responsible to pay 9 reales for each repartimiento worker that they received, which would be divided not only among the three functionaries mentioned above, but also with the papites who received 1 real for each worker they brought to the mines. Thus, according to Marquina, the system was properly funded by the miners, making any type of extortion unnecessary.¹³⁰

According to the testimonies of men from the communities of Michoacán, the workers had paid money to be exempted from working in the mines. They had argued that this money was ultimately going to the alcalde mayor. However, Marquina pointed out that since the workers themselves had not actually gone to Guanajuato, it was not possible for them to have witnessed the transaction. It was thus likely that they thought that the money had gone to the alcalde mayor, even if that were not the case. Marquina then concluded that if the workers were paying to be relieved of their tandas, but neither the alcalde mayor nor any other functionary in Guanajuato was receiving the money, then it had to be either the papites or the recaudadores who were causing the problem. He intended to find out and called on some recaudadores and papites to testify.¹³¹

¹²⁹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 150-150v.

¹³⁰ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 150v.

¹³¹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 151.

Two Spanish recaudadores, Francisco Valdez and Manuel Álvarez, both from Chilchota, were called to testify. They both supported Marquita's claims, including the assertion that the alcalde mayor had always been concerned with the workers' well-being and had done everything possible to make sure that they were treated well at the mines. They insisted that no money had ever been given to the alcalde mayor, and that they themselves had never received any money. Thus, if workers had given money to someone, they had given it secretly to the papites, who were the ones in charge of taking the workers to the mines or providing replacements. Two Tarascan papites, Andrés Valencia and Miguel Bautista, were also called to testify. In their testimonies, they simply asserted that never, under any circumstances, had workers paid the alcalde mayor any money to exempt them from working in the mines. They did not mention whether they themselves or the recaudadores were receiving any money from the workers, but it is unclear whether they could do so or not.¹³² Thus, the testimonies from Obregón y Alcocer, Marquina, the recaudadores, and the papites all unequivocally asserted that the alcalde mayor was not receiving any money and that he was quick to address the possible extortion of workers whenever it came to his attention. The papites seemed to be the weakest link in the chain and the ones that the authorities in Guanajuato blamed for the extorting the workers.

Guevara's Recommendation and Cervantes' Response

Based on these proceedings, Guevara reached some conclusions on how to resolve the impasse between miners and the Tarascan communities of Michoacán. The fiscal acknowledged the great importance of the mines and the mining industry to the economy of the colony and the

¹³² AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 151v-157.

Crown alike. In particular, he acknowledged the importance of the Guanajuato mines. He stated that “if such expressions are justified for a broad discussion of this topic, it is more so when it comes to the mining industry of Guanajuato, since the wealth in metals that are extracted from there, and their extraordinary quality and quantity...are reasons for special attention.”¹³³

However, Guevara also emphasized the important role that the viceregal government played in the protection of indigenous workers. He stated that “the freedom of the Indians is just as deserving of the most scrupulous attention for their support, relief, and protection, as expressed by the many decisions that favor them.”¹³⁴ He acknowledged that the mining industry was so important that it might require indigenous men to be forced to work in them, but only in the most extreme situations and with many limitations. Having said that, Guevara declared that his goal would be to seek a compromise between what the miners and the indigenous communities wanted.¹³⁵ However, his conclusions, based on evidence presented by the indigenous communities, which showed a great familiarity with the mining industry as a whole, was clearly favorable to the indigenous communities, at the expense of the miners’ intentions.

Conclusion this discussion, Guevara provided a final recommendation to the viceroy: “To resolve this matter in the way described, your excellency will be so kind...as to provide an order with the response included herein.”¹³⁶ This order was to be directed to Guanajuato’s justicia mayor, don Antonio de Obregón y Alcocer. He would be required to carry out a detailed survey of the mining center and its mining operations. He was to document all the mines and the number

¹³³ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 109v.

¹³⁴ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 110.

¹³⁵ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 110.

¹³⁶ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 119.

of workers that they employed, and the number of extra workers that they would need for their expansion and conservation. Next, he was to provide a census of all the idle Spaniards, mestizos, blacks, and free mulatos that lived near the mines. These people were to be the first to be sent to the mines if a need for more workers existed. Thereafter, Obregón y Alcocer was to provide an accurate number of the extra workers that would be needed to satisfy any demands for labor in the mines. These extra workers would be recruited through the repartimiento. However, before assigning the repartimiento, he was to make detailed lists of all nearby communities with indigenous populations that could provide workers for the mines. He would start with those closest to the mines, then extend his list up to ten leagues beyond, or more if necessary. Guevara then provided a general list of the type of treatment that the workers could expect, and the care that Guanajuato's *justicia mayor* was responsible to provide them.¹³⁷

Guevara then established a time limit of one month for Obregón y Alcocer to execute the tasks assigned to him, and to report back to the viceregal authorities with the information requested. Based on that information, it would be decided if and how many repartimiento workers were justified, and from which communities they would be obtained.¹³⁸ It was clear, however, that the fiscal did not intend to include any of the communities of Michoacán, as the miners wanted, since he never mentioned them in his final assessment. Rather, he seems to have focused on those communities within the *alcaldía mayor* of Guanajuato—such as Marfil (one and a half leagues away), Silao (five leagues away), and Irapuato (eleven leagues away)—and at most those of the *alcaldías mayores* of León to the west and Celaya to the south. This was not the outcome that the miners expected, or one with which they would be satisfied.

¹³⁷ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 119-122.

¹³⁸ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 122.

Cervantes did not disagree that the censuses requested by Guevara should be carried out; in fact, he claimed that it would help to show how busy the workers were in local haciendas, ranchos, and mills that supplied Guanajuato. However, he was strongly opposed to the possibility of recruiting workers from those communities through repartimiento, as that would take them away from their current occupations. At the same time, the number of workers coming from Michoacán would decrease, making the total number of workers less, not more--as he claimed was needed. On recruiting idle men from other groups (Spaniards, blacks, mulatos, etc.) Cervantes claimed that they already recruited some men from those groups, but their mobility and general lack of inclination to do this type of work made them less than desirable candidates. Guevara had requested that a list of these workers be made and used to force them to work, but Cervantes stated that it would be useless since even if they knew who the idle workers were, the difficulty would be finding them, bringing them together, and getting them to work. Another challenge would be keeping them in the workplace once they were taken there. According to Cervantes, all of this made recruiting idle men in Guanajuato time-consuming, impractical, and ultimately futile.¹³⁹

Regarding Guevara's charge to make a list of all the mines and processing haciendas near Guanajuato in order to estimate the actual number of workers needed, Cervantes considered the task to expensive to complete and, ultimately, useless since the number of mines and processing haciendas often changed, due to the nature of the mining industry. Mines that existed one day could be gone the next; a mine could have two processing haciendas one day and eight the next and vice-versa. This fact made it impractical to create a list that might become obsolete in only a

¹³⁹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 240-241.

few days, weeks, or months. Besides, even if they did attempt to create such a list, it would take a very long time to do. Cervantes estimated that it would take the *alcalde mayor* at least two years to carry out such a task, even with the help of experts on such issues. In the end, it would be difficult to get an accurate estimate of the number of workers that would be needed through *repartimiento*.¹⁴⁰

Cervantes' conclusion and petition to the viceregal authorities was very simple and straightforward: the implementation of the *repartimiento* should be left to the *alcalde mayor* of Guanajuato. He argued that because of his employment and residency in the city it was he who understood the mining industry and was aware of its labor needs. The *alcalde mayor* should be the one to determine how many workers each mine needed and how many they should get. Also, he should be in charge of sending the requests to the *alcaldes mayores* of other jurisdictions to provide the necessary workers. Cervantes claimed that this would be more practical since local authorities already kept records of tributaries in their communities and could make use of those records to assess the number of workers that each community would be responsible to send to Guanajuato. Also, this proposal would give the system the flexibility it needed, so that in times of increased production, the number of *repartimiento* workers could be increased, and in case of decline, or a larger number of voluntary workers, the number of *repartimiento* workers could be decreased.¹⁴¹

Thus, Cervantes, the Tribunal de Minería, and the Guanajuato miners requested to be given the authority to control the *repartimiento* system as they saw necessary, with little control from viceregal authorities. According to this model, the viceregal government would only play a

¹⁴⁰ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 241-242.

¹⁴¹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 242v-243.

supervisory role. In fact, Cervantes suggested that the repartimiento system should be left in the hands of the *alcalde mayor* as “comisionado” (commissioner) of the viceregal government. He argued that this was necessary for the system to work since if the miners or local authorities in Guanajuato had to resort to the viceregal government whenever they needed to modify the system, it would be too time-consuming and inefficient.¹⁴²

It is clear from the Cervantes' argument that the Guanajuato miners were not only trying to maintain the repartimiento system as it had existed for two-hundred years, but also they were trying to increase the number of workers that they received and to tighten their control of the system. Throughout those two-hundred years, the *alcalde mayor* of Guanajuato also served as *juez de tandas* (repartimiento judge) in charge of supervising the system. As such, he enjoyed some control over the functioning of the system. He was in charge of ensuring that the workers got to the mines, and of sending requests to authorities in the province of Michoacán to fulfill their obligations. However, as an official who was “comisionado” to the viceregal government, the *alcalde mayor* attempted to increase his control over the system and exercise jurisdiction over local authorities in Michoacán. In his role as *juez de tandas*, if the *alcalde mayor* wanted the authorities in Michoacán to comply with his requests, he needed to solicit a decree from the viceregal government to make it happen. As *comisionado*, he would not need to ask the viceroy any more, since the authority to regulate the system would be in his hands. Representing Guanajuato's miners, this is exactly what Cervantes wanted.

¹⁴² AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 243-243v.

The End of Repartimiento

The campaign to expand the number of workers that went from Michoacán to Guanajuato as a result of the repartimiento began in earnest in December 1776. At that time, thirty workers went regularly on tandas to Guanajuato for a six-week turn of service. The communities that had complied with this service up to that time seemed to be accustomed to the burden and did not seem too concerned about it. However, when don Juan Montero de Espinosa, Guanajuato's alcalde mayor at the time, requested an increase in the number of repartimiento mine workers, there was an immediate response first from Michoacán's Spanish authorities and then from those indigenous communities affected. Don Juan Sevillano, Michoacán's corregidor, did not comply with Montero's initial request. On Montero's insistence, he consulted the viceroy, don Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa, on how to proceed. On March 1777, the viceroy decreed a superior orden in which he commanded Sevillano to heed Montero's call for help. Sevillano then ordered his tenientes to comply with the order and provide the workers requested of them. Since that did not lead to the desired result, Sevillano sent a conductor personero to make sure that the communities complied. However, leaders of all the communities affected—including those that had faithfully complied with repartimiento demands in the past—decided to fight the renewed attempt to impose and expand the repartimiento system. They did so in the viceregal courts, where they obtained, ultimately, a favorable outcome.

In the year of 1777, many communities in Michoacán had been ordered to provide a certain number of workers. Most complied, at least partially, but at the same time began to file legal proceedings to exclude themselves from the system. The first communities to initiate a legal battle against the repartimiento were those around Lake Pátzcuaro—including communities

in the tenencias of Erongarícuaro, Santa Clara del Cobre, and Pátzcuaro. As the first legal action on this matter, it established the tone for the general struggle against the repartimiento. The case began in July 1777, when the communities gathered the necessary testimonies and evidence that they used to argue their case before the viceregal authorities. By August 1777, the case was in the hands of viceregal authorities who were to adjudicate the case, mainly the fiscal, Baltasar Ladrón de Guevara, and the asesor general, Martín Aramburu.

Given the facts of the case, on September 30, 1777, Guevara's recommendation to the viceroy was the following: "Your Excellency will be so kind as to order that *for now* no changes should be made, nor should Indians of the jurisdiction of Pátzcuaro be bothered with the mentioned repartimientos and a decree should be dispatched."¹⁴³ Aramburu agreed with this assessment and Viceroy Bucareli accepted their recommendation. On October 29, 1777, the viceroy issued the decree stating that: "...I order the justice of the jurisdiction of Pátzcuaro that *for now* no changes should be made nor should the supplicants be bothered with the repartimientos to go work in the Guanajuato mines."¹⁴⁴ This ruling was very significant in that it influenced subsequent cases that were eventually made against the use of repartimiento in the Michoacán province. It only stated that "por ahora" (for now) or "en el ínterin" (in the interim) workers could not be forced to go to the mines in tandas. Nonetheless, intentionally or not, it set a strong precedent that encouraged other communities to protest, and now it would be difficult for viceregal authorities to shift course without resistance from the affected communities. In that

¹⁴³ AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 148, f. 12. "Se servirá mandar Vuestra Excelencia que *por ahora* no se haga novedad ni se moleste a los indios de la jurisdicción de Pátzcuaro con los citados repartimientos y se libre despacho." Italics are mine.

¹⁴⁴ AGN, Minería, 1777, Vol. 66, ff. 119-119v. "...mando al Justicia de la jurisdicción de Pátzcuaro de que *por ahora* no se haga novedad ni se moleste a los suplicantes en los repartimientos que expresan para ir a trabajar a las minas de Guanajuato." Italics are mine.

sense, the Guanajuato miners had been correct to assert in 1719 that they did not want to allow the workers from Zacapu to be excused from serving their *tanda* to the mines for fear that their example would motivate other communities to do the same.¹⁴⁵

After the outcome of the first legal case against the *repartimiento*, other communities followed suit in filing their own complaints. On January, 1778, the communities of San Francisco Angamucutiro, Puruándiro, Tacámbaro, and Capula submitted their own legal actions. Uruapan followed soon after in February, Tacámbaro and Tingüindín in March, Tingambato in April, Tiríndaro in May, and Numarán in June. Somewhat later, Indaparapeo submitted their case in September, San Nicolás Acuichio in October, and some months afterwards, on May 1779, Chucándiro followed suit. These constituted the cases that would be considered by the viceregal authorities, each of which included several communities.

Given the nature of the arguments presented, it is very likely that the communities communicated with one another, and that this was a coordinated effort to defeat any attempt by the Guanajuato miners to re-impose the *repartimiento*.¹⁴⁶ In their lawsuits, the plaintiffs often cited previous rulings and sought similar rulings in their cases. For example, Uruapan directly appealed to a ruling made in favor of the communities around Lake Pátzcuaro. They described how they had been forced to provide workers in the most recent *tanda* without knowing that those of Santa Clara del Cobre, Erongarícuaro, and Pátzcuaro had been exempted from sending workers. Since they had been excluded from this superior *orden*, they were asking for their case to be considered and to be granted a similar ruling.¹⁴⁷ In fact, most of the evidence, testimonies,

¹⁴⁵ AGN, Minería, 1719, Vol. 134, 11.

¹⁴⁶ Castro Gutiérrez has also pointed this out, “La resistencia al *repartimiento*,” 251.

¹⁴⁷ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 14-14v.

and arguments they presented followed the same format as those presented by Santa Clara del Cobre, Erongarícuaro, and Pátzcuaro. The same could be said for most of the other cases that would follow suit.¹⁴⁸

The next community to receive a favorable ruling from the viceregal authorities was Puruándiro. On February 1778, the fiscal stated: “Being that this request is so well founded in what the Real Audiencia understands the laws to be...the fiscal finds it just that your excellency be so kind as to issue the decree...[granting] these Indians what they have requested in the way that they propose, adding that this order should be observed, fulfilled, and executed as the Real Audiencia has presented, with a fine of five-hundred pesos to the alcalde mayor or anybody else who disobeys it.”¹⁴⁹ Soon after, on the same month, Santiago Capula received their decree, although it was less categorical than that of Puruándiro and included the qualifier “por ahora.”¹⁵⁰ Tacámbaro received a positive ruling excluding them from the repartimiento on May 1778,¹⁵¹ while those of Tiríndaro received it on July of that same year.¹⁵² Given the number of cases and the seriousness of the issue, the fiscal decided to tackle all of them at the same time and confronted the miners with a twenty-eight point reply at the end of August 1778. From this time forward, the discussion would be between the viceregal authorities, especially the fiscal Guevara, and the miners’ lawyer, Bernardo Cervantes. However, given the favorable decisions already

¹⁴⁸ As Kevin Terraciano mentions, this could also reflect strategies of the lawyers who oftentimes represented several of the demanding towns and used the same general formula for all the cases. Personal communication, September 2017.

¹⁴⁹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 284v-285.

¹⁵⁰ AGN, Indios, 1778, Vol. 66, Exp. 96, f. 139.

¹⁵¹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 258v.

¹⁵² AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 144.

handed down to the communities of Michoacán, and the positive attitude of viceregal authorities toward the communities, the fate of the repartimiento was practically sealed by the time that Cervantes submitted his long-awaited reply of thirty-seven points on October 1779. Castro Gutiérrez points out that the cases simply languished over time and no conclusion was reached. He also suggests that the repartimiento probably continued to be applied as it had been before Guanajuato's miners attempted to change the system.¹⁵³

Conclusion

Several factors led to a severe labor shortage in Guanajuato after the mid-eighteenth century that, according to the miners, could ruin the mining industry in that city if necessary measures were not taken. Their suggestion was to intensify the repartimiento labor draft that had been practiced in the region since the end of the sixteenth century. Although miners continued to rely to some extent on the repartimiento in Guanajuato by the mid-eighteenth century, the number of men serving in the labor drafts had decreased significantly. Nonetheless, Guanajuato's miners saw this institution as a useful tool that they could use to further their own interests. However, Guanajuato's miners attempt to reimpose the repartimiento system led to an overwhelming response from many indigenous communities in Michoacán. The conditions that had made it possible to establish this system in the middle of the sixteenth century had changed. The system of negotiation that had made possible its implementation during two centuries had

¹⁵³ Castro Gutiérrez, “La resistencia al repartimiento,” 255. I concur with Castro Gutiérrez’s conclusion, given that I have not uncovered any evidence that contradicts it. However, it is also likely that some of the communities in Michoacán that had provided workers for the mines before the attempted changes may have decided to take advantage of the situation and tried to free themselves from this onerous imposition once and for all. This seems to have been the position taken by the community of Uruapan, which had faithfully provided workers to Guanajuato's mines throughout the colonial period, but objected when the changes were introduced. Gavira Márquez also reaches a similar conclusion, but points out that the pressure on indigenous communities continued even after the cases were closed. Gavira Márquez, *Minería y población*, 49.

been replaced by a more authoritarian regime that tried to impose a law that the affected groups were not willing to tolerate. Ironically, this attempt by miners to intensify the repartimiento system encouraged towns to try to eradicate a system that had no place in the social and political context of the late-eighteenth century. During the system's two centuries of operation, however, constant migrations to and from the mines by people from indigenous communities throughout Michoacán and Guanajuato had left a profound mark on the population of the mining center and its surrounding communities. Contrary to what has often been claimed, indigenous men and women played a significant role in the mining industry, and they had an important presence in Guanajuato throughout the colonial period. This presence is the topic of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Indigenous Ethnic Identity in Guanajuato

Significant demographic changes coincided with two centuries of the repartimiento system in New Spain. Population movements generated by the economic activity of the Guanajuato mining industry led to deep and significant transformations in the region. The influx of people to the Guanajuato mines and its adjacent towns, ranchos, and haciendas has led many scholars to describe the region as a "melting pot" of different racial/ethnic groups—including indigenous migrants, Spaniards and other Europeans, and people of African ancestry. This has emphasized the mixed—or “mestizo”—nature of the population of this mining town and its surrounding communities. It is true that different groups worked and lived together, intermarried, created shared spaces and, ultimately, a shared culture; but the narrative has also overlooked the indigenous presence in this mining town.

Indigenous men and women consistently outnumbered people from other groups, and yet they have often been relegated to a secondary role in the history of Guanajuato. The narrative establishes that indigenous groups existed in the pre-Hispanic period, but they were dispersed and small in number, and were thus rapidly displaced by incoming immigrant groups who replaced them. These new groups included Spaniards, Africans, and indigenous immigrants. By the end of the colonial period, the contribution of all three groups had led to a thoroughly mixed society. What this narrative assumes is that all three groups contributed with equal numbers to the mix, but that was not the case. Both, indigenous groups that lived there since before the Conquest and those that migrated to the region after the arrival of the Spaniards, made an

important contribution to the composition of Guanajuato's population and its history.

The Invisible Majority

One could claim, and not be too far from the truth, that the vast majority of the population of present-day Mexico possesses indigenous ancestry. But that fact would not be evident if we are bound to the traditional parameters of indigeneity that have made it all but impossible for the majority of Mexicans to assert their indigenous roots. Restrictions to claiming indigenous identity include cultural practices, language, dress, place of residence, level of education, socioeconomic status, and many others. Thus, a person who does not conform to certain stereotypes associated with “traditional” indigenous culture—despite being biologically indigenous—is often simply labeled, or self-identifies, as mestizo, which is generally understood as “non-indigenous.”¹⁵⁴

Until recently, the Mexican census has calculated the number of indigenous people living in the country by counting only those people who speak an indigenous language.¹⁵⁵ This criterion has reinforced the notion that indigenous people, like the languages they speak, are in a state of inevitable decline. Most indigenous languages are, in fact, in decline and have been since the early colonial period, when indigenous people started speaking Spanish. Indeed, by the end

¹⁵⁴ As Roth-Seneff points out, indigeneity has often been understood “by assumptions related to the social fact of a dichotomy between traditional society and modern society; between rural and urban lifeways; between ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ societies; or between unchanging societies that reduce conflict through ritual and those more open to revolution and technological change.” Andrew Roth-Seneff, “Ethnic Landscapes: Territoriality, Time Immemorial, and the Twenty-First Century,” in *From Tribute to Communal Sovereignty: The Tarascan and Caxcan Territories in Transition*, edited by Andrew Roth Seneff, Robert V Kemper, and Julie Adkins (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2015), 6.

¹⁵⁵ Robert Kemper and Julie Adkins, “Indigenous Population Transformations in West-Central Mexico,” in *From Tribute to Communal Sovereignty: The Tarascan and Caxcan Territories in Transition*, edited by Andrew Roth Seneff, Robert V Kemper, and Julie Adkins (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2015), 19.

of the colonial period, indigenous people in many places were fully fluent in the Spanish language and often no longer spoke an indigenous language. Based on the criteria of the Mexican census, they would not be counted as part of the indigenous population. However, a recent change incorporated to the *intercensal* survey of 2015 promises to change that dynamic.¹⁵⁶ The survey includes the option for people to self-identify as indigenous (*autoadscripción indígena*) or to self-identify as of African ancestry (*autoadscripción afrodescendiente*). The results are contained in table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Ethnic/racial identity in the Mexican census, 2010 and intercensal survey, 2015

	Total Population (2015)	Indigenous Language Speakers (2010)	Indigenous Self-Identity (2015)	African Ancestry Self-Identity (2015)
Mexico	119,938,473	6,695,228 (5.6%)	25,786,771 (21.50%)	1,439,262 (1.2%)
Guanajuato	5,864,777	14,835 (0.25 %)	535,454 (9.13%)	0 (0%)
Michoacán	4,599,104	136,608 (3 %)	1,273,491 (27.69%)	4,599 (0.1%)
Oaxaca	3,976,297	1,165,186 (29.3%)	2,613,620 (65.73%)	194,838 (4.9%)

Source: INEGI, *Encuesta Intercensal 2015*, <http://www.beta.inegi.org.mx/app/areasgeograficas/?ag=11>.

Based on the number of indigenous language speakers, the indigenous population of Mexico was estimated to only be 5.6 percent of the total population in 2010, but the number went significantly up to 21.50 percent of the total population when people were given the option

¹⁵⁶ The *intercensal* survey is a survey done between census counts to update information to the most recent census. The most recent *intercensal* survey was done in 2015 and had, according to INEGI, “the goal to actualize the sociodemographic information at the half point of the period between the census of 2010 and the one that will be carried out in 2020. It contemplates topics considered in previous censuses and retains comparability with them, but it also incorporates topics of recent interest among users.” INEGI, *Encuesta Intercensal 2015*, <http://www.beta.inegi.org.mx/proyectos/enchogares/especiales/intercensal>.

to self-identify as indigenous in 2015. In Guanajuato, it went from a mere 0.25 percent to 9.13 percent, and in Michoacán from only 3 percent to 27.69 percent. For purposes of comparison I include the state of Oaxaca, a state broadly recognized as predominantly indigenous. In Oaxaca, the number also more than doubled from 29.3 percent to 65.73 percent. The numbers for Mexico as a whole and for the three states considered, although I suspect still low compared to the total number of people of indigenous ancestry, demonstrate that allowing people to determine their own identities can make a significant difference in assessing ethnicity—an important point to remember for the upcoming discussion.¹⁵⁷

The Long Debate About Indigenous Identity

The perception that indigenous people are slowly disappearing started a long time ago. The problem started with the way in which indigenous identity was conceptualized from the very beginning. Before the arrival of Europeans to the American continent, it could be argued that all people were “indigenous,” but as Robert Kemper and Julie Adkins have pointed out, there was no single designation for all the different groups that inhabited the land and no “others” with whom to compare them, so that the term would have little meaning.¹⁵⁸ When Europeans and Africans came to the American continent, they were the “others” with whom indigenous groups were compared; but even then, the idea of who was and who was not indigenous became entangled in legal and political debates about the nature of indigenous people.

¹⁵⁷ I did not include an analysis of self-identification as of African ancestry since there were no previous numbers to compare it with and the number of people adopting that identity is still small. However, it is important to note that the number of people self-identifying as African also seems to be on the rise, and the biological contributions of this racial/ethnic group is now being recognized in the historiography and Mexican popular culture.

¹⁵⁸ Kemper and Adkins, “Indigenous Population Transformations,” 19.

From the beginning, the debate did not address whether somebody was biologically indigenous or not, but rather what type of rights and privileges were conferred on that individual or the group to which he or she belonged. Different interest groups attempted to define what it meant to be indigenous: whether they had a soul and they were thus humans; whether they were “civilized” humans and deserved to be free; or whether they were vassals of the king and deserved his protection. In 1501 Queen Isabel determined that indigenous people were free vassals, but later, in 1503, resolved that some—such as those from the Caribbean islands—were uncivilized and could thus be enslaved. Also, people who resisted conversion to Christianity could be enslaved if captured in a so-called *guerra justa* (just war).¹⁵⁹ In 1542, the New Laws established once and for all that indigenous people were subjects of the King of Spain and, as such, remained under his protection.¹⁶⁰ However, as often happened, there were still debates and attempts to deprive indigenous people of the rights and privileges that as “free vassals” they deserved. In part, this was due to the restrictions that such a designation put on Spanish colonists.

Hector Grenni states:

If the aborigines ‘were people,’ ‘that had souls,’ they had the same rights that the Spanish habitants of the peninsula, and not only could they not be enslaved, they could participate in the decisions, in the same way as other subjects of the Crown. Therefore, they could own land, pay tribute, decide on communal questions, conquer, hold public office, etc. This put in question the *raison d’être* of the conquest itself.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Nancy E. van Deusen, *Global Indios: The Indigenous Struggle for Justice in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 2-3.

¹⁶⁰ “Y porque nuestro principal intento y voluntad siempre ha sido y es de la conservación y aumento de los indios, y que sean instruidos y enseñados en las cosas de nuestra santa fe católica, y bien tratados, *como personas libres y vasallos nuestros, como lo son*; encargamos y mandamos a los del dicho nuestro Consejo tengan siempre muy gran atención y especial cuidado sobre todo de la conservación y buen gobierno y tratamiento de los dichos indios...” *Leyes Nuevas 1542*, Biblioteca Digital Valenciana, 3.

¹⁶¹ Héctor Grenni, “Las ‘Leyes de Indias’: un intento por considerar a los indígenas como personas con derechos,” *Teoría y Praxis* 4 (2004): 12-13.

Thus, as Nancy van Deusen explains, ordinances and decrees instituted by the Spanish Crown were contradictory and piecemeal, with exceptions and special privileges granted to individuals and groups that could, in essence, circumvent the legislation that protected indigenous people.¹⁶²

Therefore, from the beginning, indigeneity was a complicated, malleable category that allowed the exclusion of broad groups of individuals that could be classified as indigenous from a biological perspective, but not necessarily from a legal perspective. Adding qualifiers to the term "indigenous" could exclude many people, as well. For instance, indigenous people labeled as *naborías* in the Caribbean and New Spain or *yanaconas* in the Andes were individuals that served as servants to influential people, either Spanish or indigenous. Often, they did not belong to a specific indigenous polity—such as an *altepetl* in central New Spain or an *ayllu* in the Andes—and this limited the protections that they could expect from colonial authorities. Technically free, they were often forced into lifelong servitude and could be sold and traded. Van Deusen states that *naboría* “was a catch-all term that blurred the legal boundary between freedom and slavery and between servant and slave.”¹⁶³ Bakewell describes *yanaconas* of the early colonial period as relatively “free-floating” individuals who early on attached themselves to the Spanish conquerors, he claims that “of all the groups in central Andean native society, it was they who ranged themselves with the Spanish most quickly and most thoroughly, readily abandoning their defeated local masters for the victors.”¹⁶⁴ Detached from indigenous

¹⁶² Van Deusen, *Global Indios*, 4-5.

¹⁶³ Van Deusen, *Global Indios*, 5.

¹⁶⁴ Peter J. Bakewell, *Miners of the Red Mountain: Indian Labor in Potosí, 1545-1650* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 35.

communities, *naborías* and *yanacónas* were early on excluded from some of the protections afforded to indigenous men and women living in indigenous communities. Also, they were especially subject to acculturation or, as some would call it, *mestizaje*.

Given Guanajuato's location and dynamic economic activity, its indigenous history has often been ignored or undermined. Chapter 1 of this dissertation documents a strong, persistent indigenous presence in Guanajuato in pre-Hispanic times. When the Spaniards arrived, the area was inhabited by different groups called "Chichimecas." The Chichimecas lived in scattered settlements and did not have a centralized government; whatever form of political organization they did have collapsed by the end of the sixteenth century. They were, inevitably, among the first casualties to claims of indigeneity. In a sense, they became invisible. Most narratives of the history of Guanajuato, either directly or indirectly, reach the same conclusion. It is true that many in this group died in the first decades after contact with Spaniards due to epidemic diseases, like all indigenous groups, but no reliable information exists to suggest that the demographic collapse led to their complete decimation. What does exist is evidence that they continued to exist: living in small, scattered, rural settlements. Even as the Chichimeca War raged, Guillermo de Santa María describes how they were congregated in towns—such as San Miguel and Pénjamo—along with Otomíes and Tarascos.¹⁶⁵ Later, the Chichimecas and other indigenous migrants from central and western Mexico populated the Guanajuato mining center and its neighboring towns, haciendas, and ranchos, contributing to a continued indigenous presence in the region.

¹⁶⁵ Santa María, *Guerra de los Chichimecas*, 219-220.

Challenges to Indigenous Ethnic Identity in Colonial Irapuato

Irapuato and Silao were two satellite communities of Guanajuato, called *congregaciones* throughout the colonial period. According to the miners themselves, the two communities were important subsidiaries of the mining industry, part of Guanajuato's *alcaldía mayor* with their own *tenientes* and later *subdelegados* when Guanajuato became an *intendencia* in 1787.¹⁶⁶ Given their proximity to the mines and close links to the mining industry, in general, they were often seen as extensions of the Guanajuato mining center. For example, in 1766 when the miners petitioned the viceregal authorities to exempt mine workers from enlistment and recruitment to the militias, they argued that not only workers living in Guanajuato should be excluded from the recruitment, but also workers from Silao and Irapuato. They claimed that workers from these two *congregaciones* could in fact be classified as mine workers, given their participation in the mining industry directly and indirectly. They argued:

In a way, Your Excellency, one could say that in this Real all are mine workers because you will not find one that is not connected, and who does not participate in the mining industry, either working in the mines or in the refining haciendas. The same happens with the rest of the residents of this jurisdiction, as is the case with the *congregaciones* of Irapuato and Silao, who are dependent and linked with the mine workers, supporting them and helping them with corn and other grains, mules, and the rest that is necessary to keep this mining center and the rest of this jurisdiction working.¹⁶⁷

Aside from the fact that Irapuato and Silao's workers served a supporting role to Guanajuato's mine workers, the miners also indicated how local and regional temporary migrations provided the mining industry with the labor force it needed. They argued that workers could not perform the difficult labor of working in the mines without periods of rest, when they

¹⁶⁶ Gerhard, *Guide*, 122.

¹⁶⁷ AHG, Fondo Militar, 1766, Caja 1, Exp. 3, f. 3v.

could go back to their communities and tend to their lands or engage in other work, and later return to the mining center with renewed energy. Thus, even those who could not, technically speaking, be called mine workers one week, could become mine workers the following week, given the seasonal nature of the labor system. The miners argued that this system was necessary since it would be impossible to secure a labor force for the mines without giving them a break from this “heavy and almost unbearable work.”¹⁶⁸

Further evidence of this seasonal labor system is provided by Silao’s priest, Antonio Vázquez de Victoria, who was assigned the task of carrying out a census of the population of Silao, which he concluded in 1754. Vázquez explained that only a rough estimate of the indigenous population could be given since “the said Indians are *vagos* [free-floating] unattached to a specific town, and with the mines of the city of Guanajuato only five leagues away...they go to work there, and it is not possible to produce a census with a fixed number of parishioners.”¹⁶⁹ This testimony points to the significant role that Silao played in Guanajuato’s mining industry and the fluidity of the population due to the labor demands of the mines.

Like Silao, Irapuato was closely linked to Guanajuato’s mining industry, but it was also far enough to develop its own social, economic, and political relationships. Over the course of the colonial period, the interaction between Irapuato’s Spanish and indigenous groups was often conflictive. The specific details of the foundation of Irapuato, which took place in the mid-sixteenth century, is in doubt given that there are contradictory accounts of its first inhabitants

¹⁶⁸ AHG, Fondo Militar, 1766, Caja 1, Exp. 3, f. 4.

¹⁶⁹ Isabel González Sánchez, *El Obispado de Michoacán en 1765* (Morelia: Comité Editorial del Gobierno de Michoacán, 1985), 296-297.

and the way in which it was founded.¹⁷⁰ The indigenous population of Irapuato carried out a legal struggle at the end of the seventeenth century to claim—or maintain, as they argued—status as a *república de indios*, but the Spanish colonists strongly opposed the move. Spaniards claimed that the congregation was, from the beginning, a Spanish community and that neither Tarascans nor Otomíes had ever possessed autonomous indigenous governments.¹⁷¹

It was not uncommon for Spanish colonists throughout New Spain to deny indigenous communities the right to organize as repúblicas de indios, since repúblicas often impeded or undermined their interests. For instance, Laurent Corbeil has studied the case of the indigenous barrio of San Miguel in San Luis Potosí, where Spanish authorities used the barrio's absence of a well-defined status to control the indigenous population. In fact, Corbeil argues that “the lack of a formal status weakened the capacity of the inhabitants of San Miguel to identify with a specific community. It also meant doing without the official authority of a governor, an essential position in negotiating with the Spaniards.”¹⁷² In a similar manner, Spanish colonists fought any attempt by Irapuato’s indigenous groups—mainly the Tarascans, but also the Otomíes—from gaining recognition as repúblicas de indios.

Although it is unclear who founded the town, and when, what is clear is that by the

¹⁷⁰ Paredes Martínez, *El hospitalito de Irapuato*, 10; Luz Antonia Miranda Félix, “Los indios de la cofradía de Nuestra Señora de la Misericordia: identidad y estrategias de resistencia (1685-1810)” (Master’s thesis, Universidad de Guanajuato, 2016), 65. Spaniards and Tarascans debated the foundation of the town. The Tarascans claimed to have founded it in the 1540s, while the Spaniards claimed to have founded the congregation in the 1550s. It is interesting to note, however, that the name of the congregation is a Tarascan name, Irapuato (from Jiricuato, place of low houses), something which may suggest an early Tarascan presence and, possibly, as they argued, a Tarascan settlement preceding a Spanish settlement. *Enciclopedia de los municipios y delegaciones de México, Estado de Guanajuato, Irapuato*, <http://siglo.inafed.gob.mx/enciclopedia/EMM11guanajuato/municipios/11017a.html>.

¹⁷¹ Paredes Martínez, *El hospitalito de Irapuato*, 18.

¹⁷² Laurent Corbeil, “Identities in Motion: The Formation of a Plural Indio Society in Early San Luis Potosí, New Spain, 1591-1630” (PhD dissertation, McGill University, 2014), 126.

beginning of the seventeenth century there was already an important number of residents—both Spanish and indigenous—that lived and worked in the different *estancias* and *labores* around Irapuato.¹⁷³ There is also evidence of indigenous authorities who represented the indigenous groups of the town. The two groups that had a well-established presence in Irapuato were the Otomíes and the Tarascans. Both possessed their own *cofradías*—Nuestra Señora de la Misericordia for the Tarascans and San José for the Otomíes—that were used as a space for social and political organization in their legal struggles against the Spanish colonists.¹⁷⁴ In particular, the Tarascans used the *Cofradía de Nuestra Señora de la Misericordia* from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century to sustain a long and difficult struggle against the Spaniards and their attempts to dispossess them of their lands and other properties.¹⁷⁵

The following sections consider two cases from eighteenth-century Irapuato that illustrate the ways in which indigenous identity was undermined at the end of the colonial period by Spanish colonists who saw it as a threat to their own interests. The first case involves more than one-hundred families that tried to establish a *república de indios* in Irapuato, in a site behind the Franciscan convent. Their attempts were frustrated when they encountered strong resistance both from the Spanish colonists and local authorities—which were often the same group of people. The second is a petition by an individual named Juan Bautista de Frías y Zabala and his brothers who wanted to be recognized as indigenous. However, as in the first case, they were met with opposition by the Spanish authorities of Irapuato, who insisted on classifying them as “castas” and treating them as such.

¹⁷³ Miranda Félix, “Los indios de la cofradía,” 69-70.

¹⁷⁴ Miranda Félix, “Los indios de la cofradía,” 73-80.

¹⁷⁵ Miranda Félix, “Los indios de la cofradía,” 81-136.

An Indigenous Town in a Spanish Space

By the end of the colonial period, indigenous groups throughout New Spain found more and more resistance by Spanish colonists to be recognized as such. This was the case in Irapuato where Otomíes, Tarascans, and Spaniards had settled by the mid-sixteenth century. However, as Carlos Paredes Martínez has demonstrated, by the seventeenth century the Spanish colonists were fighting to deny the Otomíes and Tarascans the right to rule themselves through their own governments, to the point that by the eighteenth century they denied that these groups had ever had their own repúblicas de indios, in spite of overwhelming documentary evidence that contradicted that claim.¹⁷⁶ In this context, in 1774, more than one-hundred families produced a petition to form their own república de indios in Irapuato.¹⁷⁷ These families had settled on a lot, located behind the Franciscan convent, that they rented from a priest, don Ramón Barreto de Fabora. Upon his death, the priest left instructions to his executor, don Francisco Gutiérrez de Robles, to allow the families to continue to live and work on the site. However, at the death of Barreto, the families were removed from the site, their belongings seized, and their dwellings destroyed. In response, the families made a petition to form their own república de indios.¹⁷⁸

As established in the Recopilación de Leyes, the families requested a townsite of six-hundred varas of land. Soon after the *teniente*—representing the interests of the Spanish colonists—complained that such an arrangement would not be possible. The *teniente* argued that the creation of a república de indios would necessarily affect nearby properties, since there were

¹⁷⁶ Paredes Martínez, *El Hospitalito de Irapuato*, 18.

¹⁷⁷ AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1773, Caja 16, Folder 2, Exp. 1.

¹⁷⁸ AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1773, Caja 16, Folder 2, Exp. 1, f. 5.

no “empty spaces or vacant lots.”¹⁷⁹ Thus, other ranchos and haciendas would have to give up parts of their properties to give the new community the six-hundred varas that the law required. The lawyer representing the families, Mariano Pérez de Tagle, suggested that a system of payment could be established so that the families could get the land they needed from their current owners. As expected, local authorities argued that the site in question was already inhabited by other indigenous people, as well as mulattos, Spaniards, and mestizos. It was thus considered “unsuitable for an indigenous community.”¹⁸⁰ They claimed that the area had become a “den of vices and insolences” because it was inhabited by people from various castas.¹⁸¹ The *teniente* argued that the law was established to keep *repúblicas de indios* away from the bad influences of other groups, especially the castas. It was one of the New Laws of 1542, confirmed in the *Recopilación* of 1680. The goal was to prevent non-indigenous groups from settling in and bothering indigenous communities. However, in this case, the law had been invoked for the opposite reason. That is, instead of preventing non-indigenous groups from settling in indigenous communities, the law was used to prevent an indigenous community from settling in an area inhabited by other groups.

The *teniente* proposed that the families should settle in a nearby community, on the

¹⁷⁹ AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1773, Caja 16, Folder 2, Exp. 1, f. 1v.

¹⁸⁰ AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1773, Caja 16, Folder 2, Exp. 1, f. 2. The idea that indigenous towns with people from other castas somehow became unsuitable to be considered truly “indigenous” was already prevalent throughout the region. For instance, in 1760 one of León’s priest, Francisco Xavier de Ugarte, described two indigenous towns in the outskirts of the city as follows: “Besides the ones mentioned above, there are two towns subject to this city: the one called San Miguel and the other San Francisco del Cuisillo. At first, they were all Indians, but in the present with the mixture of other bloods not all of them are pure, although the ones that live in [those towns] take themselves as such...” Oscar Mazín Gómez, *El Gran Michoacán: Cuatro informes del obispado de Michoacán, 1759-1769* (Zamora, Mich.: El Colegio de Michoacán, Gobierno del Estado de Michoacán, 1986), 68.

¹⁸¹ AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1773, Caja 16, Folder 2, Exp. 1, f. 2v. The text reads: “*madriguera de vicios e insolencias.*”

outskirts of Irapuato. First, he argued that it would prevent them from wandering aimlessly throughout the region, which was thought to promote vice and idleness.¹⁸² Second, it would provide a place for them to settle as a town, which is what they desired. But this proposal presented several challenges for the families: they would be forced to leave lands that they had worked for many years, which were conveniently located within Irapuato, in order to go to a place outside the town limits, to lands that would most likely be less valuable. Also, they would need to abandon their houses and other properties and to build new ones. Finally, by settling in a new town, possibly on somebody else's lands, they faced a number of complications that could lead to future conflicts.

In 1776 officials reached a decision in the case. The resolution by a judge simply stated that “the Indian families shall not get a license to live outside of a reduction.”¹⁸³ The decision not only did not give the families the right to establish a town where they lived, but it actually denied them the right to live “outside of a reduction,” forcing them to abandon the lands where they lived in order to find another place more suitable for them, as the law required. It is not clear what happened after this ruling. What is certain is that no *república de indios* was established in Irapuato at that time; the Spanish colonists would not allow it. However, it is difficult to believe that more than one-hundred families were forced to abandon the town. Rather, we can assume that some form of accommodation was reached, as often happened in similar cases, and that the families were able to return to the site that they occupied formerly, continuing to work the lands without making legal claims to them or demands to establish an indigenous town.

¹⁸² AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1773, Caja 16, Folder 2, Exp. 1, f. 2v.

¹⁸³ AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1773, Caja 16, Folder 2, Exp. 1, f. 6.

This case presents several significant conclusions. Spanish colonists—many of them criollos—controlled Irapuato’s local government and used the law to promote their own power at the expense of other groups, especially indigenous groups. The plaintiffs’ indigenous identity proved insufficient to found a town where they lived, but local authorities used that same identity to try to force them to settle outside the town’s limits. The case also shows that there was an active and energetic indigenous population in Irapuato, even in the late colonial period. Although authorities never questioned the indigenous identity of the plaintiffs, they never paid much attention to it, either. The legal proceedings never divulged the specific indigenous ethnic group to which the plaintiffs belonged, or any details about their indigenous identity. And yet it is clear that these people worked collectively in a coordinated manner to promote their common interests: to defend the lands on which they lived and to create an indigenous town.¹⁸⁴

Being Indigenous in a Spanish Town

If the case discussed above shows how Spanish colonists fought against the establishment of an indigenous town in what they considered to be a Spanish space, a second case reveals how the same group fought against classifying individuals as indigenous. A petition submitted by Juan Bautista de Frías y Zabala and his brothers addresses the issue of who could be and could not be classified as indigenous.¹⁸⁵ In 1794, plaintiffs requested to continue to be recognized as indigenous tributaries, and not as castas, as the promotor fiscal of the Real Hacienda had tried to characterize them. For that reason, Frías found it necessary to prove his

¹⁸⁴ However, it is also clear that most of the indigenous population, even if identified as such, did not necessarily work collectively. The Spanish authorities seemed to have been worried that the case could awaken a sense of collective identity in the indigenous population of Irapuato that could threaten their control over the congregación.

¹⁸⁵ AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1795, Caja 37, Folder 1, Exp. 2.

identity, and that of his brothers.

Frías' first attempt to clarify the situation was to obtain testimony from the tribute collectors, Juan Manuel de Ojeda and Juan Manuel de Sistos, both Spaniards, who testified that they had always considered Frías to be an indigenous tributary, and that they did not know him as anything else. They both testified that the father, Agustín Frías Zabala, and the brothers' uncles were classified as castizos, whereas the mother, María Esmeregilda López, was a “legitimate Indian” since “it is manifested by her aspect and ordinary style of the Indians.” Juan Manuel de Sistos concluded his testimony by clarifying that the plaintiffs were not “anything but pure Indians.”¹⁸⁶

In this case the definition of the term “Indian” was utilized in a very particular way. Apparently, both the plaintiffs and the tribute collectors employed a very broad definition that included individuals with non-indigenous blood. In this case, the term “casta” seems to have been reserved for those of African ancestry, which the plaintiffs denied. Information presented to the judge established that Agustín Frías’ uncle, Diego Marcía de Frías y Zabala, had self-identified as a castizo in a case from 1768, after repeated attempts by the court to classify him as a casta. The case was resolved in his favor; since that time, he and his family were “in the peaceful and legitimate possession of the right not to pay tribute as blacks, lobos, coyotes, and other castas perceived as evil.”¹⁸⁷ When the case was reopened, the Frías brothers referred to their uncle’s case and, together with the testimony of the tribute collectors, they expected the case to be resolved in their favor.

As mentioned above, colonial legislation ascribed certain rights, privileges, and

¹⁸⁶ AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1795, Caja 37, Folder 1, Exp. 2, ff. 2-2v.

¹⁸⁷ AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1795, Caja 37, Folder 1, Exp. 2, f. 5v.

protections to indigenous identity. For example, the New Laws of 1542 prohibited indigenous slavery and mechanisms of legal defense were established so that indigenous populations could access viceregal courts.¹⁸⁸ However, indigenous identities also imposed certain responsibilities that discouraged individuals from associating themselves with such an identification.¹⁸⁹ To be classified as indigenous required the payment of tribute that initially applied only to this ethnic/racial group; indigenous people were also obligated to provide personal service for the construction and maintenance of churches, roads, and other public works. And, of course, Indigenous communities also provided mine workers through the onerous repartimiento system.

In the present case, the plaintiffs saw their indigenous identification as positive, in that they would be required to pay less in tribute than those classified as castas. In Guanajuato, at the end of the eighteenth century, people classified as castas paid 20 reales, whereas those classified as indigenous paid 16 reales.¹⁹⁰ For this reason, it makes sense that the plaintiffs insisted on being classified as indigenous. However, local Spanish authorities decided who could and could not be classified as indigenous, based on their own interests and that of the Spanish colonists of Irapuato whom they represented.

In this way, civil and ecclesiastic authorities of Irapuato intervened in the case presented by the Frías brothers. The promotor fiscal of the Real Hacienda rejected the information presented by the Frías brothers by claiming that it did not comply with the established norms of the Auto Acordado of the Real Hacienda.¹⁹¹ Also, he argued that if they wanted to be classified

¹⁸⁸ See, for instance, Grenni, “Las ‘Leyes de Indias’”, and Miguel Menéndez Méndez, “El trato al indio y las Leyes Nuevas: una aproximación a un debate del siglo xvi,” *Tiempo y Sociedad* 1 (2009): 23-47.

¹⁸⁹ Eric R. Wolf, *The Mexican Bajío in the Eighteenth Century: An Analysis of Cultural Integration* (New Orleans: Middle American Research Institute, Tulane University, 1955), 186.

¹⁹⁰ AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1795, Caja 37, Folder 1, Exp. 2, ff. 4, 5v.

¹⁹¹ AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1795, Caja 37, Folder 1, Exp. 2, f. 8v.

as indigenous and not castas, they had to undertake the same process as those who wanted to be exempted from paying tribute. This obligation involved a long and complicated process since it required the plaintiffs to secure legal documents that in many cases were difficult to obtain from local authorities, who were disinclined to provide such evidence, as we will see.

In June of 1794, the judge ordered the plaintiffs to present evidence provided by the Spanish *alcaldes mayores* and justices, or indigenous governors, *alcaldes*, or other town officials from the *republicas de indios* to which they belonged. The judge also required priests in the plaintiff's parishes to testify to their identities, based on baptismal or marital registers that the priests kept. The judge threatened to declare the proceedings void if any of this evidence was missing. The town priests, don Diego Antonio Salvago and don José Manuel López, were among the first to receive the plaintiffs' petition. Both concluded that they could not provide what the Frías brothers had requested since they argued that this case only applied to parishes in indigenous towns; since Irapuato was a Spanish town, it was not possible to do what they requested. Similarly, Irapuato's *alcalde ordinario*, Simón Cortazar, used the same argument by stating that it was a Spanish town and, consequently, he could not provide testimony or cooperate with the investigation.¹⁹²

The Spanish authorities of Irapuato refused to confirm the indigenous identities of individuals who sought to obtain particular benefits or to claim their legal rights, which undermined the interests of many Spanish colonists who held the most important positions of authority in the town. By denying access to baptism or marriage certificates to confirm the Frías brothers' identity, the priests actively sabotaged the case, and the *alcalde* supported their position.

¹⁹² AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1795, Caja 37, Folder 1, Exp. 2, ff. 9v-10v.

This case suggests a general Spanish attitude toward indigenous identity: to be considered truly indigenous, a person had to reside in an indigenous town. In this sense, indigenous people of Irapuato—and Guanajuato, more broadly speaking—“disappeared” despite the fact that they continued to live there.

The lawyer representing the Frías brothers, José Mariano de la Concha Castañeda, answered in an energetic and well-reasoned manner. First, he argued that the legislation should not be taken literally, even though it referred to indigenous towns. He acknowledged the significant differences between indigenous and Spanish towns, but he insisted that the local authorities in this case had refused to execute a simple task. He claimed that every law has a literal meaning, but that other interpretations could be as valid, if the authorities were just willing to consider the purpose of the law in question.¹⁹³ Ultimately, the point was not whether it was a simple or difficult matter for local authorities to satisfy what the Frías brothers were asking, but rather that they had to establish a simple narrative: namely, there were no indigenous people in Irapuato and, in fact, there could not be indigenous people in Spanish towns. In a sense, living among Spaniards and other castas expunged one's indigenous identity.

De la Concha concluded his argument by asking for flexibility on the part of the civil and ecclesiastic authorities, explaining that they should take into consideration the poverty of the plaintiffs, who did not have the necessary resources to continue the case if it were prolonged. He proposed that the local authorities consult well-known neighbors of “good conscience” who could testify about the identity of the Frías brothers and, in that way, expedite the process. It is not clear what De la Concha was expecting of the local authorities since from the beginning they

¹⁹³ AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1795, Caja 37, Folder 1, Exp. 2, ff. 11-11v. The text reads: “Aunque la genuina inteligencia de toda ley, y la más adaptable, es la literal, por lo que demuestra su material contexto, pero no por eso se deja de poderles dar otra, que sea racional y acomodada si la mente del legislador, según su intención en ella manfieste o fin con que la dictó.”

had put obstacles to prevent the case from moving forward. In that way, Simón Cortazar, who had already shown contempt for the plaintiffs, claimed to have fulfilled what De la Concha requested and submitted a form in which he stated the following without much formality:

I made several highly suitable individuals appear before me, who have the knowledge of the matter and who took the necessary oaths, and they assured me almost unanimously that the said individual [Agustín Frías] and his brothers are lobos since their mother is one, that for which is she known and reputed.¹⁹⁴

In this period, "lobo" (literally, "wolf") referred to a person of African descent, mixed with various other ethnicities. It was a pejorative ethnic term. The alcalde did not indicate the identities of these "highly suitable" individuals, or how they were qualified to testify in the case. His response represents a reproach to the plaintiffs and their legal case.

De la Concha complained to the judge about the alcalde's lack of seriousness and the inadequacy of his response, requesting that he be ordered to make a proper inquiry. He also asked that the priests be required to fulfill their responsibility to produce available baptism and marriage records, which, contrary to their arguments, was a common practice that should not involve any payment of money. The judge agreed with De la Concha and ordered the alcalde to carry out what was requested of him and to ensure that the priests did the same.¹⁹⁵

In response, the alcalde Simón Cortazar produced two testimonies by don Bernardo Juvenal and Juan José González, both Spaniards from Irapuato. Both witnesses declared that the father of the plaintiffs was mestizo, although they also clarified that he and his brothers had at some point claimed to be Spaniards, and the mother was loba "since her appearance manifests it so."¹⁹⁶ The information from the marriage certificate established that the plaintiffs' parents,

¹⁹⁴ AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1795, Caja 37, Folder 1, Exp. 2, f. 15.

¹⁹⁵ AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1795, Caja 37, Folder 1, Exp. 2, ff. 18-18v.

¹⁹⁶ AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1795, Caja 37, Folder 1, Exp. 2, ff. 20-20v.

Agustín Zavala and María Esmeregilda López, were both classified as mestizos. Only one of the baptism certificates was found, that of José Bruno, one of the Frías brothers, which stated that his parents were both mestizos. Thus, it could be deduced that he should also be classified as such. Although the baptismal certificates of the other brothers were not found, Cortazar claimed that it was clear that they should also be classified as mestizos. However, these findings represented good news for the Frías brothers, since they had argued from the beginning that they were not “castas,” understanding the term as people of African ancestry, but rather were of indigenous ancestry—that is, mestizos.¹⁹⁷

This case reveals two things. First, Spanish colonists refused to recognize the indigenous identity of residents in what they considered to be a Spanish town. In many cases what made it “Spanish” was not necessarily the numerical superiority of the Spaniards in relation to other groups, but rather the fact that those who held power in the town were mainly Spaniards, and that they used that power to advance their own interests over those of other groups. This tendency explains their obstinate resistance to the simple possibility that some of its residents could be considered indigenous. Second, this case reveals the complicated and fluid nature of racial identities in the late colonial period. In one single case, we see how several different ethnic/racial labels were applied to one family. Two witnesses declared that the plaintiff’s father and their uncle had claimed to be Spaniards at some point in their lives. The uncle had submitted evidence to prove that he was castizo and was confirmed as such. The mother was described as pure Indian by two witnesses and as a loba by two others. The ecclesiastic records assigned a mestizo identity to the plaintiff’s parents and at least one of the Frías brothers. Finally, the Frías

¹⁹⁷ AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1795, Caja 37, Folder 1, Exp. 2, ff. 21-22.

brothers claimed an indigenous identity until it was questioned, and then they had to prove their indigeneity.

In the end, the Frías brothers sought to confirm that they were not one of the castas “perceived as evil” (that is, blacks, mulatos, lobos, coyotes, or any other mix with Africans) and that their ancestry, although mixed, was indigenous, which seems to have validated their classification as indigenous. Neither the judge, the alcalde, nor the procurador were able to contradict that claim. The Frías brothers affirmed: “We come before Your Excellency so that acting with fairness you declare that we do not have to pay tribute as castas, but as Indians, the way we have always paid, since this is the royal will of our sovereign...it has always been ordered that Indians, mestizos, and castizos must not be mixed up with the other castas of black people.”¹⁹⁸ It is not clear whether their argument enabled them to be classified as indigenous or if they were ultimately classified as castas in the tribute list, but the case allows us to explore the complicated and conflictive racial categories in Guanajuato at the end of the colonial period.

Interpretations of Mestizaje

As seen above, from a very early period, a series of restrictions and exclusions were applied to those who could and could not qualify for legal protection as indigenous people, as free vassals of the king. In the early colonial period, officials could use qualifiers—such as barbarian, uncivilized, naboría, etc.—to justify depriving an indigenous person of his or her rights. Later, the category of “mestizo” fulfilled similar purposes. The mestizo label did in fact describe some people who were biologically of mixed ancestry—in theory, Spanish and indigenous. But it also became a “catch-all term” that included “free-floating” naborías and

¹⁹⁸ AHMI, Juzgado de lo Civil, 1795, Caja 37, Folder 1, Exp. 2, f. 5v, 7.

yanacónas, acculturated indigenous peoples, people of mixed indigenous ethnicities, and others. In many ways, the new category of “mestizo” became a tool of exclusion and negation more than an ethnic description.

In Mexico, the ideology of mestizaje has played a dominant role for at least two centuries. The concept has led to the minimization, or even negation, of an indigenous presence in many places throughout Mexico. In part, this is because indigenous identity came to represent an obstacle as much to the Spanish colonists in the viceregal period as to the reformers of the nineteenth century, as well as the revolutionaries of the twentieth century. Little by little, a narrative that emphasized mestizo dominance, while minimizing the indigenous presence, came to dominate Mexican political ideology. This ideology evolved over many years, but was clearly articulated by the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Two writers who skillfully articulated the ideology of mestizaje—as it came to be understood in Mexico—were Vicente Riva Palacio and Andrés Molina Enríquez.

In 1884, Riva Palacio described what by then was already a prevalent view among many political leaders of the day—that the colonial period had been a period of incubation for the nascent Mexican nation. The narrative established what became a prevalent view: that Spanish men mixed with indigenous women to create an entirely new race—the mestizo race. Riva Palacio stated that “Mexico starts telling the true history of its existence from the moment that the first sons of the conquistadores and the women of the conquered land formed the nucleus of a new race.”¹⁹⁹ He described mestizos as a group that, being a product of Spaniards and indigenous women, was initially rejected by both, forcing them to develop their own identity.

¹⁹⁹ Vicente Riva Palacio, *México a través de los siglos. Historia general y completa del desenvolvimiento social, político, religioso, militar, artístico, científico y literario de México desde la antigüedad más remota hasta la época actual* (Mexico City: Balleca y Compañía, 1884), 898.

This gave birth to an authentic Mexican identity, which was nourished by both the indigenous and Spanish contributions, but ultimately was a completely new creation. He states: “The situation to which Mexicans were reduced at the time of the Spanish dominion and in which like pariahs they did not have the right to be Spaniards or to be Indians, was the base on top of which was erected the unification of the new race; unification that was the first step to form an independent nationality.”²⁰⁰

For this new nationality, the moment of conquest was an important first step, not only because it created the “true” Mexicans—mestizos—but also because it led to the unification of the whole Mexican territory. He clarified that the independence of Mexico was not an independence of indigenous peoples, and it could not be, because it would lead to the break up of the national territory into smaller, independent nations. However, Riva Palacio added that the remaining indigenous people in Mexico passed the torch, in a sense, to mestizos by supporting them in their attempt to gain independence: “the race strictly speaking called Mexican could count, if not with all, with the vast majority of the indigenous race to proclaim independence.”²⁰¹ Thus, the mestizos, as direct descendants of indigenous people and with their blessings, were the rightful heirs of the Mexican homeland.

Only a year before the Mexican Revolution, in 1909, Andrés Molina Enríquez developed an even more energetic defense of the rightful place of mestizos as the rulers of the new nation. Like Riva Palacio, much of Molina Enríquez’s argument about the displacement of indigenous people by mestizos during the colonial period relies on the notion that a few Spaniards, who were always a very small minority, impregnated a great number of indigenous women, otherwise

²⁰⁰ Riva Palacio, *Mexico a través de los siglos*, 904-905.

²⁰¹ Riva Palacio, *Mexico a través de los siglos*, 907, 915.

the math does not work. He claimed that “The Spanish farmer, as we have already mentioned, although he sometimes married and preserved within his legitimate family his pure blood, would sow all over the place, among indigenous women, seeds of reproduction that gave him a multitude of mestizo kids.”²⁰² Molina Enríquez presents an odd, implausible scenario that appears more fantasy than fact: Spanish men reproduced with countless indigenous women, while indigenous men simply stood aside. This was a very unlikely scenario.

Molina Enríquez also described the mestizo as a race that differed from its indigenous and Spanish components. At the end of the colonial period, he claimed that the new race, like an energetic adolescent, was ready to become independent of its progenitors and to take over as the new dominant group: “All the mestizo groups had the same ideal: to become detached from the other racial elements and to overcome them.”²⁰³ Politically, Molina Enríquez associated mestizos with liberals, and he described their actions as the result of accumulated knowledge acquired from their European side combined with indigenous energy, energy that had been stopped by the Spanish conquest, but had accumulated in a state of latency during the colonial period and was ready to be used after independence in the newly formed nation.²⁰⁴

More importantly, Molina Enríquez’s work dealt with the issue of landownership. He is well known for the famous claim that “la hacienda no es negocio” (the hacienda is not a business), suggesting that the big landed estate was not the best way of owning and working the land. If the hacienda was not the best way to own and work the land, then what was? His answer

²⁰² Andrés Molina Enríquez, *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (Mexico City: Biblioteca Virtual Universal, 2010), <http://www.biblioteca.org.ar/libros/155877.pdf>, 41-42.

²⁰³ Molina Enríquez, *Los grandes problemas nacionales*, 42.

²⁰⁴ Molina Enríquez, *Los grandes problemas nacionales*, 43.

added a racial dimension to the landownership question. Not only were haciendas too big to be productive, they were also owned by the wrong people: criollos. Molina Enríquez argued that the solution was the mid-sized property called the *ranch*o. He claimed that “mestizos have formed properties of a convenient size, generally called *ranchos*, which are now the most important units of real estate.”²⁰⁵ Thus, not only were ranchos a “convenient” size, but they were owned by the right people: mestizos. Neither indigenous people nor criollos possessed the necessary tools to make the land as productive as it could be. Criollos were debilitated by internal conflicts, and indigenous people were incapable of collective action due to their lack of unity. In this view, just as ranchos were the golden mean of landed properties, so were mestizos the golden mean of the races.²⁰⁶

Molina Enríquez’s conceptualization of ranchos as mid-sized properties owned predominantly by mestizos is problematic, since “rancho” is one of those catch-all terms that defies a narrow definition. The term could be very ambiguous and malleable. Fernando Pérez-Montesinos explains that in many cases ranchos “were nothing but small settlements inhabited by a small number of people who may or may not own the small parcels they tilled.”²⁰⁷ The term *ranchería* has also been used to describe such settlements, but given the similarity of the words, they have often been used interchangeably. Thus, rancho/*ranchería* could well refer to dispersed, indigenous rural settlements. This was the case, for example, when Santa María, in the late sixteenth century, described how Guamares would settle in a town like Pénjamo with Otomíes

²⁰⁵ Molina Enríquez, *Los grandes problemas nacionales*, 115.

²⁰⁶ Molina Enríquez, *Los grandes problemas nacionales*, 45, 120.

²⁰⁷ Fernando Pérez-Montesinos, *Poised to Break: Liberalism, Land Reform, and Communities in the Purépecha Highlands of Michoacán, Mexico, 1800-1915* (PhD dissertation, Georgetown University, 2014), 109.

and Tarascos “or would get together by themselves and settle in rancherías in flat lands, without going into the mountains like they do now.”²⁰⁸

However, it is important to point out that ranchos could, in fact, also refer to the mid-sized, mestizo landholdings that Molina Enríquez had in mind, or to dependent parts of haciendas, or even small and mid-sized haciendas.²⁰⁹ Jonathan Amith warns against use of this and other terms in an uncritical manner, given the fluidity and ambiguity with which they have been used, both by contemporary observers and by scholars. He states that “rather than discrete units, names for the diversity of rural settlements (*hacienda, cuadrilla, rancho, or comunidad*) may be considered points in a starlike complex characterized by overlapping features and shared functions.” For example, Amith observes that “sharecropping *cuadrillas* acquired the accoutrements of a social organization often associated with indigenous villages and even ‘became indigenous.’”²¹⁰ Similarly, in the Bajío David Brading documented a case in 1804 in which a group of people petitioned the Crown for recognition of their ranchería as an indigenous town. Nothing came of the petition, but it highlights the complicated and fluid nature of this type of property.²¹¹ In this way, ranchos/rancherías could be very different—both in terms of the type of landholding and the racial/ethnic identity of the owners—than what Molina Enríquez had in mind. However, because of its vague meaning, the term has often been used to emphasize a mestizo dominance and the disappearance of indigenous people in a region.

²⁰⁸ Santa María, *Guerra de los Chichimecas*, 219.

²⁰⁹ Pérez-Montesinos, *Poised to Break*, 109.

²¹⁰ Amith, *The Mobius Strip: A Spatial History of Colonial Society in Guerrero, Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 124.

²¹¹ David Brading, *Haciendas and Ranchos in the Mexican Bajío, Leon, 1700-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 154.

Ultimately, for Molina Enríquez's project to work, just as ranchos would replace haciendas, it was necessary for mestizos eventually to replace indigenous people completely. Molina Enríquez was optimistic and argued that "mestizos have slowly absorbed the indigenous, and if we institute the reforms that we propose here, it is sure that they will soon be fully incorporated in its totality."²¹² Thus, as for so many others, the mestizo domination of Mexico necessitated the eventual disappearance of indigenous people, if not biologically—since by definition mestizos were in fact partially indigenous—at least by definition. Finally, he reiterated the assertion that the mestizo race had to be the dominant race of Mexico. He stated that "the fundamental and unavoidable base of all work leading to the well-being of the country, has to be the continuation of mestizos as the dominant ethnic element and as the leading political class of the population."²¹³

After the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the ideology of mestizaje became the national ideology of Mexico and was popularized by intellectuals such as José Vasconcelos and by muralists like José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros who plastered the image of mestizaje on walls throughout Mexico and the United States.²¹⁴ Mestizaje thus became imbedded in popular culture and has had a significant impact on our understanding of the history of Mexico and Latin America. The two main components of the ideology of mestizaje are an overestimation of the mestizo population and an underestimation of indigenous groups,

²¹² Molina Enríquez, *Los grandes problemas nacionales*, 260.

²¹³ Molina Enríquez, *Los grandes problemas nacionales*, 271.

²¹⁴ José Vasconcelo's *La raza cósmica* was a very influential book that, in many ways, popularized the concept of mestizaje, but his own definition of what mestizaje meant—the mix of all four races to create a new one, the "cosmic race"—was ultimately not the view that dominated in Mexico. Rather, the simpler definition of mestizaje as the mix between Spanish and indigenous people—as expressed in Riva Palacio and Molina Enríquez's works—has remained the dominant view. For a discussion of the popularization of the ideology of mestizaje through art, see Mark K. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture: Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012).

due in part to their imagined disappearance.

Indigenous Presence in Guanajuato and the Ideology of Mestizaje

Due to its geographic position and its colonial past, the present-day state of Guanajuato has come to represent what many would consider the epitome of a mestizo state. Different groups worked together, lived in the same communities, and intermarried throughout the colonial period and beyond. This was due in part to the dynamic economic activity created by the mining industry and its insatiable need for workers. The demographic mixture that followed has been interpreted through the lens of the dominant mestizo ideology, which has emphasized the role played by mestizos and consistently downplayed the role played by indigenous people. Often in subtle ways, mestizaje has found its advocates in scholars who have adapted the history of Guanajuato to fit the narrative.

Different scholars have examined demographic information on Guanajuato at the end of the colonial period and have offered conclusions based on that information. One common claim is that Guanajuato's population at the end of the colonial period was predominantly mestizo. David Brading, for instance, analyzed the composition of the population in the intendency of Guanajuato based on a census taken in 1792 (see table 5.2).

Table 5.2: Population of the Intendency of Guanajuato 1793

Indians	175,182	44%
Spaniards	103,584	26%
Castes	46,982	12%
Mulattos	72,282	18%
TOTAL	398,030	100%

Source: Brading, *Merchants and Miners*, 227.

Based on the numbers provided by the census, he concluded that "in the Bajío's population persons of mixed blood predominated."²¹⁵ At first sight, the claim seems inaccurate if we consider that Indians and Spaniards (people of "non-mixed" groups) constituted a total of 70 percent of the reported population, a majority by far. Brading reached the conclusion that people of mixed blood predominated by asserting that it was safe to assume that most Spaniards listed possessed some indigenous or African blood and thus could be classified as of "mixed blood." According to this logic, if all the "Spaniards" are added to the "mixed blood" group, 56 percent of the total population was of mixed blood. However, even according to this calculation, mestizos (included generically as castes here) were in a decided minority, comprising only 11.5 percent of the total population. Yet, Brading consistently claimed that the Bajío's population was predominantly mestizo.²¹⁶ He could only make such an argument by equating "persons of mixed blood" with mestizos. He thus concluded that "by the end of the eighteenth century the Bajío had achieved what other provinces were to reach much later—the formation of a predominantly mestizo population." And that "the Indians were already in the minority." So, not only did Brading re-classify Spaniards as "mixed blood," but he also classified all these "mixed blood" groups as simply "mestizos," supporting the claim that Guanajuato had become, at that point, a mestizo state.²¹⁷ Even if we accept Brading's designation of Spaniards as mixed-blood, his inclusion of Spaniards, mestizos, and mulattos into one big, homogenous "mestizo" group is problematic, if not totally inaccurate

Brading's approach points to one characteristic problem with the words mestizo and

²¹⁵ Brading, *Merchants and Miners*, 227.

²¹⁶ Brading, *Merchants and Miners*, 224.

²¹⁷ Brading, *Merchants and Miners*, 227.

mestizaje. These words have been used equivocally to refer specifically to the offspring of Spanish and indigenous parents as well as to biological and cultural hybridity, in general. The *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* provides the following definitions of mestizo: “1. Said of a person: Born of father and mother from different races, especially white men and indigenous women, or indigenous men and white women; 2 Said of a culture, of spiritual things, etc.: Deriving from the mixture of different cultures.”²¹⁸ It provides the following related definitions of mestizaje: “1. Cross of two different races; 2 Mixing of different cultures, that gives birth to a new one.”²¹⁹ These definitions are so broad that they allow for any level of mixture, whether biological or cultural, to be considered mestizaje. The ideology of mestizaje in Mexico has adopted both a narrow and a broad definition of the term, and both have been used to extend mestizo dominance temporally and spatially, even when the numbers suggest a different reality.

In a more recent study, Margarita Villalba Bustamante explored the nature of the population that lived in the vicinity of La Valenciana, the most productive silver mine in the world by the end of the colonial period. Villalba Bustamante’s findings are very interesting and informative, given the size and significance of La Valenciana mine in the late eighteenth-century. The results of her analysis of ecclesiastic censuses from 1805 is presented in table 5.3.²²⁰

²¹⁸ *Diccionario de la Lengua Española, Edición del Tricentenario*, <http://dle.rae.es/?id=P3kMzAQ>.

²¹⁹ *Diccionario de la Lengua Española, Edición del Tricentenario*, <http://dle.rae.es/?id=P3hORZd>.

²²⁰ Unfortunately, Villalba Bustamante only provides percentages and not the actual numbers, which would have helped determine the population density and the total number of individuals in each group.

Table 5.3: Population of La Valenciana (percent), 1805

	Indigenous	Spaniards	Mestizos	Mulattos
Plaza San Ramón y su barrio	26	54	16	4
S. Ramón y Plaza de Esperanza	41	33	25	1
Barrio del Señor del Perdón	47	44	4	5
Calle de los Arandas	56	40	2	2
Cañada de España	63	25	7	5
Tiro de Ntra. Sra. de Guadalupe	66	24	8	2
B. del Tiro Nuevo y de Esperanza	73	18	2	7
Hoyos y Presa del Descalzo	77	19	1	3

Source: Villalba Bustamante, "La Valenciana," 179-181.

One advantage of the information provided by Villalba Bustamante is that it includes women and indigenous people (who were excluded from the broadly-used military census of 1792). Also, its focus on specific neighborhoods reveals demographic information at the local level, something that is lost in broader censuses. Certain conclusions can be drawn from the information. Mestizos never constituted more than 25 percent of the total population and, in most places, were only a very small percentage of the total (only 1 percent in Hoyos and Presa del Descalzo, for example). Mulattos did not exceed 7 percent of the population. The two biggest groups, by far, were Spaniards and indigenous. The neighborhood with the lowest percentage of indigenous people was the Plaza San Ramón in the town's center, and the only one where indigenous people were not the largest single group. In this neighborhood, Spaniards constituted 54 percent of the total population, which is expected given that this is where the most influential and wealthy people of La Valenciana lived, including at some point, Antonio de Obregón y

Alcocer, the Conde de la Valenciana.²²¹ In two other neighborhoods, Plaza de Esperanza and Señor del Perdón, indigenous people constituted less than 50 percent, although they were still the largest single group. In the remaining five neighborhoods indigenous people were a clear majority; in two places, Barrio del Tiro Nuevo y de Esperanza and Hoyos y Presa del Descalzo, indigenous people comprised more than 70 percent of the total population.

Villalba Bustamante highlights the heterogeneity of La Valenciana's population and the process of mestizaje that was occurring in this period, considering the close living and working relationships among the different groups.²²² While I agree with Villalba Bustamante that the population of La Valenciana was certainly diverse, and surely much interaction was taking place, calling it "mestizaje" is problematic for the reasons that I have discussed above. The fact that the actual term "mestizo" was not broadly used, even in a large and diverse mining town, suggests the limitations of applying a modern concept to the colonial past. Projecting mestizaje into the past, onto a society in which the very people who identified as mestizos were a decided minority, presents some problems. Furthermore, this same information provides clear and convincing evidence of a vibrant indigenous presence in the Guanajuato mines as late as 1805. Only in one place—Plaza San Ramon—did the indigenous population fall to 26 percent of the total, whereas in all other places they constituted the largest single group and in most cases comprised the majority—a fact that is often overlooked when mestizaje is emphasized.

²²¹ Villalba Bustamante, "La Valenciana," 177-178.

²²² Villalba Bustamante, "La Valenciana," 182.

Indigenous Participation in the Riots of 1766 and 1767

The rebellions that rocked New Spain between 1766 and 1767 resulted from several changes that ensued from the Bourbon Reforms, which Spanish and viceregal authorities began to implement in full by the second half of the eighteenth century. The implementation of those reforms led to widespread discontent in many towns and cities throughout the viceroyalty, but they were particularly felt in mining centers, given their wide economic influence over broad regions and the volatile nature of their populations. In Guanajuato, there were two major riots that challenged colonial authorities: one in July 1766 and another in July 1767. The 1766 riot was triggered by rising taxes on staple foods, the establishment of a tobacco monopoly, and the enlistment and forced recruitment of militias.²²³ According to local authorities, the new regulations and the overzealous way in which they were carried out by colonial administrators, had a disastrous impact on the mining industry. Guanajuato's local authorities consistently complained of the implementation of the new reforms and the impact it was having on the mining industry. In a letter sent to the viceregal authorities, Guanajuato's *alcalde mayor*, don Rodrigo José de los Ríos Enríquez, described Guanajuato's dire situation in the following way:

Overwhelmed this commerce and mining industry with such irregular and frequent changes that are introduced by the respective administrators, looking out for their own interests and to the serious detriment of the public interest, what can we expect in the enlistment and recruitment to the militias, if not the absolute ruin of this opulent mining center and its commerce? And with people so prone to restlessness and disturbances, there will be one of such magnitude that can cause us serious difficulties and more to Your Excellency.²²⁴

Ignoring the pleas of local authorities in Guanajuato, changes were implemented and on July 17, 1766 the population responded by rioting. Thousands of people participated in the riot,

²²³ AHG, Fondo Militar, 1766, Caja 1, Exp. 3, ff. 2-2v.

²²⁴ AHG, Fondo Militar, 1766, Caja 1, Exp. 3, f. 2v.

demanding a repeal of the most recent policies with the classic slogan “long-live the King, death to bad government.”²²⁵ Local authorities pacified the crowd by acceding to their demands and continued to appeal to viceregal authorities to moderate their impositions on this agitated population. They described how the population perceived the new impositions as tyranny, since it went against established custom (*costumbre*), a concept that was very important in the negotiated interactions between rulers and ruled in Spanish colonial society, and which had legal validity in the colonial judicial system.²²⁶

The changes and impositions persisted, despite the pleas by Guanajuato’s authorities. Social tensions continued to escalate. On July 1, 1767, with the attempted expulsion of the Jesuits, the population rose up again. The uprisings continued for several days and led to more significant damage than the events of the previous summer. The rebellious crowd of several thousand targeted the royal houses, where they destroyed whatever they could, including gunpowder, which they threw into the river.²²⁷ Once the rioting subsided, local authorities began an extensive investigation into the events and the people who had participated in the *tumultos*. In the riots of 1766, little evidence exists of the racial/ethnic composition of the crowds that participated in the events; but the events of 1767 elicited a more energetic response by the authorities, who waged a war of repression, arresting hundreds of people and, in the process, documenting the racial/ethnic composition of the people who participated in the riots.²²⁸

²²⁵ AHG, Fondo Militar, 1766, Caja 1, Exp. 3, ff. 12-12v; Tutino, *Making a New World*, 235.

²²⁶ AHG, Fondo Militar, 1766, Caja 1, Exp. 3, f. 12v; Yannakakis, *The Art of Being In-between*, 116-117.

²²⁷ AHG, Fondo Militar, 1767, Caja 1, Exp. 4, ff. 1v-2.

²²⁸ In his study on the ethnic composition of the insurgents of the Mexican war of independence, Eric Van Young has demonstrated the usefulness of the information contained in criminal legal proceedings against captured rebels. He cautions, however, that “the data do not comprise a sample in the generally accepted sense of the word, since no principle of selectivity—randomness or any other—was employed to extract them from a larger universe. Rather, the information represents everything that could be culled from the documentation consulted and forms a sample only in

In the aftermath of the riots of 1767 and the repression that followed, Spanish authorities arrested several hundred people in Guanajuato and interrogated 271 of them. The record provides important information about the accused individuals, including their name, *calidad* (race/ethnicity), marital status, occupation, place of origin and residence, age, and a description of their activities before, during, and after the riots.²²⁹ Of the 271 individuals, 170 (63 percent) described their occupations in the mining industry, as *barreteros*, *tenateros*, *operarios de minas*, and even *tantzitas* (repartimiento workers). The remaining 101 individuals (37 percent) worked in diverse number of occupations—many which could be considered auxiliary to the mining industry. This group included carbon makers, bakers, blacksmiths, and loggers. The most important information for our purposes is the racial/ethnic identity of those who participated in the riots. One significant advantage of this type of questionnaire is that the individuals who participated in the riots were those who were asked about their identity and replied. It is true that they were interrogated in a time of duress, but they responded in their own words about who they were.²³⁰ Of the total number of individuals questioned, indigenous participants constituted the single largest group—42 percent of the total. Next was mulattos, who comprised 24 percent, followed by mestizos at 19 percent, and Spaniards at 11 percent of the total (see table 5.4).

the sense that it may claim some representativeness for a much larger undocumented population.” Eric Van Young, *The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence, Ideology, and the Mexican Struggle for Independence, 1810-1821* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 525. Similarly, the information contained in the criminal cases of the 1767 uprising in Guanajuato only includes a small number of rioters who were captured and does not follow any principle of selectivity, as Van Young mentions. However, we can argue that the sample population, although small, can in fact be considered representative of the total number of participants.

²²⁹ AHG, Fondo Militar, 1766, Caja 1, Exp. 4, ff. 1-235.

²³⁰ The fact that it was an individual’s self-identification does not, however, guarantee any type of absolute “accuracy” given the level of racial/ethnic ambiguity that existed in the late colonial period and subjective circumstances that could influence an individual’s classification at any given time. See Van Young, *The Other Rebellion*, 41.

Table 5.4: Ethnic/racial identity of captured rioters, Guanajuato 1767

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent
Indios	5	2%
Indios “ladinos”	110	40%
Mestizos	51	19%
Spaniards	29	11%
Mulattos	65	24%
Other	11	4%
TOTAL	271	100%

Source: AHMG, Fondo Militar, 1767, Caja 1, Exp. 4, ff. 1-235

It is important to note that most indigenous men were classified, or self-identified, as “indios ladinos.” The term “ladino” is a complicated term. In its simplest definition, it can be translated as “fluent.” This seems to have been the sense of the word in the interrogations, since the word “ladino” was almost always followed by “en la lengua castellana” (in the Spanish language), meaning that it mainly referred to an individual’s language skills. For example, Prudencio Eugenio Martínez was described as an “indio ladino en la lengua castellana, que es la única que habla y entiende,” which can be translated as “indigenous man fluent in the Spanish language, which is the only one that he speaks and understands.” Similarly, José Joaquín is described as an “indio ladino en la lengua castellana, que es la que comúnmente habla” (indigenous man fluent in the Spanish language, which is the one that he commonly speaks).²³¹

The term could also have strong social and cultural connotations. Yanna Yannakakis states: “In the New World, ‘ladino’ took on a range of associative meanings, varying regionally in terms of positive and negative connotations.”²³² In a very broad sense, it could refer to

²³¹ AHG, Fondo Militar, 1767, Caja 1, Exp. 4, f. 6.

²³² Yanna Yannakakis, “Indios ladinos,” 6.

hispanized or acculturated Indians, both in terms of their understanding of the Spanish language and their appearance.²³³ There is no doubt that there was already a high level of acculturation in Guanajuato by the mid-eighteenth century, so it is very likely that most of the men arrested could be described as “ladinos” in that sense of the word, as well, but it is not clear from the interrogations if that was intended. However, it is very indicative that only 5 of the 115 individuals identified as indigenous, did so without the qualifying term “ladino.” Of those, three identified themselves as Otomíes, two of whom—Juan Alejandro Calderón and Juan de Aguilar—claimed to speak Spanish “very well,” and the other one—José Tomás—was said to speak “very little” Spanish. In fact, it was noted that “although [José Tomás] was asked other questions, he was not able to answer them since he could only speak his own language.” The other two men identified as indigenous without the qualifier “ladino”—José Vicente de Salas and Melchor de los Reyes—were described as “indios tributarios” (tributary Indians).²³⁴

Some individuals were identified in multiple ways. For instance, Bartolo de la Cruz was identified as “indio ladino” but it was said that “although he is Otomí, he can speak and understand the Spanish language.” Manuel de los Santos was identified as indio tributario ladino. In an interesting twist, one of the men classified as “indio” without the qualifier ladino, Juan de Aguilar, had three sons—Patricio de Aguilar, Martín de Aguilar, and Francisco de Aguilar—all of whom were identified as indios ladinos, a clue that the term ladino could also have strong connotations of acculturation. It is important to highlight that, besides the four examples of men

²³³ Most often, knowledge of the Spanish language and acculturation went hand-in-hand. Velasco Murillo asserts that “one of the hallmark characteristics of acculturated Indians or ‘Indios ladinos’ was their ability to speak Spanish.” Velasco Murillo “Urban Indians,” 207.

²³⁴ AHG, Fondo Militar, 1767, Caja 1, Exp. 4, ff. 56v, 60v, 107v.

who specifically identified as Otomíes, only one more individual—Andrés Jacinto—claimed to belong to a distinct indigenous ethnic group, “mexicano” (most likely Nahuatl-speaker from central Mexico).²³⁵ This general lack of a specific indigenous ethnic identity testifies to the high level of integration between the different indigenous groups that came to work and live in this mining town.

Although most men identified as indigenous were described as ladinos, they were nonetheless indigenous and they were the largest single group of the interrogated rioters (42 percent). The next largest group were mulattos (24 percent). This finding contradicts recent interpretations of the riots of 1766 and 1767. In a recent work on the Bajío, John Tutino has suggested a dominant mulatto participation in the riots. He explains that mulattos, who were especially impacted by the introduction of the Bourbon Reforms, along with other groups who faced “social insecurities,” led the attack against the system that oppressed them. He states: “The insecure, mostly mulatto peoples of mining communities were essential to the silver economy and key targets of Bourbon reforms. Mineworkers led the resistance of the 1760s, which extended to nearby communities of ethnic fluidity and social insecurity.”²³⁶ Furthermore, he claims that “for months mineworkers—mostly mulattoes—had resisted taxes, monopolies, and militia recruitment. On 17 July [1766] they mobilized...” And that “the mulatto majority at Guanajuato rebuffed core demands of postwar Bourbon reformers in New Spain.”²³⁷ Thus, according to Tutino, mulattos constituted the core agitators of the uprisings, followed by other groups facing similar structural challenges.

²³⁵ AHG, Fondo Militar, 1767, Caja 1, Exp. 4, ff. 50v, 81, 107v-109v, 36.

²³⁶ Tutino, *Making a New World*, 246.

²³⁷ Tutino, *Making a New World*, 235.

The number of mulattos arrested and interrogated in 1767 attests to the significant presence that mulattos had in Guanajuato and the important role that they had in the riots, but it is not the dominant role that Tutino has suggested. In part, Tutino bases this assertion on the reported mulatto population of Guanajuato. The results of a series of ecclesiastical censuses carried out between 1754 and 1755 registered the composition of the population of Guanajuato as follows: 6,313 Spaniards (19 percent), 2,957 Indians (9 percent), and 23,303 individuals labeled as mestizos/mulattos (72 percent).²³⁸ The fact that mestizos and mulattos were lumped together leads to some uncertainty as to the actual number of mulattos in the total count. This uncertainty, however, comes from the censuses and the way they were done. The censuses were assigned to regional commissioners of the Tribunal of the Inquisition to learn more about the towns that comprised each of the commissioner's precincts.²³⁹ The instructions provided to the commissioners specified the information that they were charged to gather. They were asked to provide the names of the towns in their jurisdictions, the distances between the towns, and to identify the ecclesiastic court, bishopric, and *alcaldía mayor* to which their precincts belonged. More importantly for our purposes, they were asked to provide the population of the towns in each precinct and the people's ethnic/racial identity. In the questionnaire that the Tribunal of the Inquisition sent, they asked for the number of Spaniards, people of "broken color" (*color quebrado*), and indigenous people.²⁴⁰ The instructions did not ask for mulattos, mestizos, and

²³⁸ Tutino, *Making a New World*, 542.

²³⁹ González Sánchez, *El Obispado de Michoacán*, 9.

²⁴⁰ González Sánchez, *El Obispado de Michoacán*, 277. One possible issue with the concept of people of "broken color" (*color quebrado*) is that it can be very ambiguous and could have been used in cases with any level of uncertainty, thus over representing the group of people of mixed ancestry.

other castas to be counted separately, and so, they were not. Thus, those numbers do not specify the actual proportion of mestizos, mulattos, and other castas in Guanajuato.

Regardless of the actual proportion of mestizos, mulattos, and other castas, if the census is correct, the people of mixed ancestry (*de color quebrado*) were an overwhelming majority in Guanajuato, and yet that is not reflected in the number of people arrested and interrogated in 1767. Combined, mestizos, mulattos, and other castas were about 47 percent of the captured rioters. If they constituted about 70 percent of the total population, and indigenous people only about 10 percent, how did they participate equally in the riots of 1767 (42 percent indigenous versus 47 percent mestizos, mulattos, and other castas)? Perhaps the census offers a possible explanation. The information was collected from commissioners in their respective precincts, who reported numbers to the Tribunal of the Inquisition. It is unclear how the commissioners computed the numbers, and how reliable their information was. For instance, Guanajuato's commissioner, Juan Manuel Galván y Rojas, cautioned that "it was not possible to make a reliable count of the number of people that live in this city and its surroundings given the great number of free-roaming outsiders [*gente vaga foranea*]."²⁴¹

Furthermore, the information that the commissioners submitted could be very inconsistent in terms of how they classified individuals. One recurring problem was that a person's racial/ethnic identification in official records could differ significantly from how that person identified himself. Eric Van Young states that "there was a great deal of fluidity in the assignment of ethnic labels in the late colonial period, for example, both in self-identification and in a given individual's perception of other people."²⁴² This was a problem with which some of

²⁴¹ González Sánchez, *El Obispado de Michoacán*, 309.

²⁴² Van Young, *The Other Rebellion*, 41.

the commissioners had to contend. For instance, don Luis María Fernando de Coz y León, Salamanca's commissioner, stated that he could not differentiate between Spaniards and people of "broken color" (mestizos, mulattos, lobos, etc.) since "some claim to be what they are not and others are undecided." The only group that he seemed confident to classify as distinct from the others was the indigenous one.²⁴³ Similarly, Celaya's commissioner, José de Villaseñor y Cervantes, only reported *gente de razón* (Spaniards, mestizos, mulattos, and other castas) and indigenous people, without trying to provide any more precise information on the actual number of Spaniards or other castas. Some commissioners did not even bother to divide the population into groups. For example, Antonio Félix Valdés, San Felipe el Real's commissioner, only reported the total number of people that lived in the town, without making any distinctions at all.²⁴⁴ Thus, what the commissioners reported was very subjective and inconsistent. This fact does not necessarily mean that the information they provided lacks any value, but it must be used with caution.

The reliability of the censuses can also be called into question by comparing the ecclesiastic census of 1755 with the military census of 1792, both which were consulted by Tutino. In the military census of 1792, the total population of Guanajuato remained the same, about 32,000, but the breakdown of the population was: 18,068 Spaniards (56 percent), 9,645 mestizos/mulattos (30 percent), and 4,385 Indians (14 percent).²⁴⁵ If these numbers are true, then

²⁴³ González Sánchez, *El Obispado de Michoacán*, 302.

²⁴⁴ González Sánchez, *El Obispado de Michoacán*, 313.

²⁴⁵ Tutino, *Making a New World*, 542. Just as important, Tutino forgets to mention that the 1792 census excluded indigenous commoners, and the number provided (4,385) only represents non-tribute-paying caciques. Thus, the 14 percent is only a part (and most likely only a very small part) of the total indigenous population of Guanajuato. Brading, *Merchants and Miners*, 248; Villalba Bustamante, "La Valenciana," 149.

in less than two generations the population of Guanajuato changed from predominantly mulatto/mestizo to predominantly Spanish? It is a very unlikely scenario. One possible explanation might be a large population movement at the end of the colonial period. Again, it is very unlikely and, in any case, undocumented by other sources.

Another possible explanation is that people adopted different identities. Tutino asserts that “many offspring of the mining city’s mulatto majority of 1755 had claimed Spanish status by 1792.”²⁴⁶ There is some evidence to suggest that something like this could have happened. For instance, as mentioned above, in 1754 don Luis María Fernando de Coz y León, the priest in charge of carrying out the census in Salamanca, complained of the difficulty of differentiating between Spaniards and people of “broken color.” This anecdote does point to some level of confusion, but it is unclear if racial/ethnic identity was fluid enough to explain the sudden growth of an ethnic group from 30 percent to 70 percent of the total population in only thirty-seven years.²⁴⁷ Villalba Bustamante observed a similar discrepancy between the military census of 1792 and the ecclesiastic census of 1805 that she used to estimate the population of La Valenciana. In the military census of 1792, mulattos constituted about 48 percent of the population, but by 1805 they constituted less than 10 percent of the total population, a massive shift in just thirteen years that surely cannot be explained by population movements or “passing” strategies.²⁴⁸ Most likely, it was a combination of both—people adopting new identities and new identities being imposed on people—that explains the differences.

²⁴⁶ Tutino, *Making a New World*, 543.

²⁴⁷ González Sánchez, *El Obispado de Michoacán*, 302.

²⁴⁸ Villalba Bustamante, “La Valenciana,” 171, 177.

One possible factor that could have impacted the outcome of censuses is the degree of the population's mobility at the end of the colonial period. Referring to the wars of independence, Van Young cautions against making generalizations about a particular geographic region's ethnic composition: "it must be admitted that people in the period 1810-21 moved around a good deal, so that characterizing any given episode of collective action, or a series of them, with reference to the 'normal' ethnic makeup of the geographic zones within which they occurred is problematic."²⁴⁹ Guanajuato's population included individuals from a diverse number of places, not just the city itself. To reiterate, Guanajuato's own commissioner mentioned that the information he provided could not be too accurate given the number of "gente vaga foranea."²⁵⁰ Others made similar claims. For instance, Silao's commissioner, Antonio Vázquez de Victoria, explained that only a rough estimate of the indigenous population could be given because the "said Indians are *vagos* [free-roaming] unattached to a specific town, and with the mines of the city of Guanajuato only five leagues away...they go to work there, and it is not possible to produce a census with a fixed number of parishioners."²⁵¹

John Tutino is correct in asserting that there was a large mulatto presence in Guanajuato and its surrounding communities. He is also correct to point out the significant role that mulattos played in the riots of 1766 and 1767. The contribution by people of African ancestry to Mexican history, like that of indigenous people, has often been ignored or denied. In that sense, Tutino deserves credit in calling attention to that neglected side of Mexican history. However, I argue that information contained in the criminal cases against the rioters more closely reflects reality

²⁴⁹ Van Young, *The Other Rebellion*, 45.

²⁵⁰ González Sánchez, *El Obispado de Michoacán*, 309.

²⁵¹ González Sánchez, *El Obispado de Michoacán*, 296-297.

on the ground. That information suggests a strong mulatto presence in the riots, but it also documents a very significant indigenous presence, which cannot be denied. The fact that the most prominent ethnic/racial group to participate in the riots was indigenous reflects the broader demographic reality of Guanajuato and its surrounding communities.

The Organization of Space

It is important to consider a mining center within its regional context in order to understand the people who lived and worked there—its labor force. Guanajuato had a deep, enduring connection with the Province of Michoacán, in part due to the labor demands of the mining center. As could be expected, the Guanajuato mining center was also connected in many ways to nearby communities, towns, ranchos, and haciendas. The population in and around Guanajuato was especially mobile, migrating both on a seasonal and permanent basis. This mobility is further illustrated by information contained in the legal proceedings against the rioters. The number of rioters from Guanajuato was 69 (25 percent), from towns and communities in Guanajuato's jurisdiction 108 (40 percent)—including Irapuato, Silao, mine towns (*cuadrillas*), haciendas, and ranchos. They also came from towns, cities, and communities outside Guanajuato's jurisdiction 94 (35 percent); these included thirty-two different places, such as towns in the nearby *alcaldías mayores* of Celaya, León, San Felipe, San Miguel el Grande. They also included towns in Michoacán, such as Valladolid, Uruapan, Apatzingan, Chilchota, Pátzcuaro, and Charo. Finally, they came from cities as far away as Mexico City, Pachuca, Real del Monte, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, Aguascalientes, and Guadalajara. Also, when the authorities sent arrest orders against rioters, they sent them to different towns, including León, Silao, Irapuato, Salamanca, Celaya, San Francisco Chamacuaro, and San Miguel el Grande,

where they made several arrests. This information suggests a high degree of mobility and regional migration.²⁵²

Contrary to what is sometimes asserted, indigenous workers participated fully in the mining industry. But rather than living in urban spaces, they often preferred to live in adjacent communities—such as Silao and Irapuato—where they could maintain a certain level of autonomy and important aspects of their cultures. Dana Velasco Murillo has demonstrated how this process in Zacatecas led to the formation of indigenous barrios around the mines. She states that “as the Spanish town grew parallel communities of ethnically and linguistically distinct indigenous migrants evolved on the outskirts of the city. Their location was not the product of city planning. Rather it was an equal combination of economic expediency and segregation that led to the establishment of indigenous settlements near any site that sustained profitable mining operations.”²⁵³ This arrangement happened in several towns throughout Guanajuato. One example is the town of Acámbaro, which reported its population to be composed of Spaniards, mestizos, Africans, mulattos, and Indians, but was surrounded by eight indigenous towns (*pueblos de indios*) which were Jerécuaro, Tocuaro, Chupícuaro, Puruagua, Tarandacua, Iramuco, Contepec, and Coroneo.²⁵⁴ In 1765, a report described all the towns, except Iramuco and Tocuaro, as inhabited by Otomí-speaking people. Iramuco was inhabited by Purépecha-speaking people, and Tocuaro did not specify a language group.²⁵⁵ This example illustrates what

²⁵² AHG, Fondo Militar, 1767, Caja 1, Exp. 4, ff. 52-60. Villalba Bustamante has also pointed out the great level of mobility among mine-workers of Guanajuato in the late colonial period. She states: “The geographic mobility that took place among the workers and residents of La Valenciana contradicts the static image of the population of Guanajuato that David Brading and Claude Morin expressed.” Villalba Bustamante “La Valenciana,” 148-157; and Villalba Bustamante “El trabajo en las minas de Guanajuato,” 53-55.

²⁵³ Velasco Murillo, “Urban Indians,” 61.

²⁵⁴ González Sánchez, *El Obispado de Michoacán*, 306.

²⁵⁵ González Sánchez, *El Obispado de Michoacán*, 102-106.

Velasco Murillo describes as the “traditional urban space, with a Spanish core surrounded by several Indian pueblos.”²⁵⁶ Often, an indigenous presence has been minimized by simply focusing on the Spanish core and ignoring the many indigenous spaces created around the main Spanish city, town, or mining center.

Besides settling near the mines, Velasco Murillo observes that “the indigenous population in Zacatecas was also augmented by a large number of Indians who lived on the outskirts and the hinterlands. Within a few miles of the city, large population clusters of Indians lived in adjacent mining haciendas.”²⁵⁷ In Guanajuato, there was an endless number of haciendas and ranchos with large populations. In fact, some places had larger populations than the main urban spaces. For instance, Salamanca’s population in 1754 was 1,408. It was surrounded by four indigenous towns—Santa María Nativitas, San Juan de la Presa, Santa Cruz Baltierrilla, and San Pedro—with a total population of 1,221 people. Furthermore, there were several ranchos and haciendas in its jurisdiction with a total indigenous population of 7,623 people.²⁵⁸ If we focus on the ethnically diverse population that lived in Salamanca’s urban space, we might overlook the much larger indigenous population that lived in its hinterlands. Guanajuato’s working population extended far beyond its urban space, into adjacent towns, haciendas, ranchos, and other settlements. Given the importance of the Guanajuato mining industry and its increased production at the end of the colonial period, its regional impact was even greater than other centers, and it is thus important to understand the entire region’s contributions to its labor force in order to understand the ethnic/racial composition of Guanajuato’s dynamic population.

²⁵⁶ Velasco Murillo, “Urban Indians,” 64.

²⁵⁷ Velasco Murillo, “Urban Indians,” 77.

²⁵⁸ González Sánchez, *El Obispado de Michoacán*, 302-305.

Conclusion

The history of Guanajuato is intertwined with the development of the mining industry and economic activities associated with this industry. Mines, haciendas, ranchos, estancias, and labores all contributed to the demographic growth of the Guanajuato mining center and its surrounding area. This intense economic activity attracted a continuous flow of people to the Bajío, making it one of the most densely populated regions in Mexico by the end of the colonial period. People of different ethnic/racial groups came together to work in the mines, haciendas, and other enterprises, leading to important demographic and cultural changes. These changes have often been associated with a process of racial mixing known as *mestizaje*, and the outcome a predominantly mestizo society. However, censuses and other sources portray a different situation. By the very end of the colonial period, indigenous people exerted a strong presence throughout Guanajuato. Indigenous people constituted the backbone of the labor force for Guanajuato's mining industry from the beginning to the end of the colonial period. The fact that they worked with other groups, that they lived in urban spaces, and that they often "acculturated" has led many scholars to conclude that they were not there or that, if they were there, they were not really indigenous.

The alleged disappearance of indigenous peoples from the past and the present is an idea that continues to resonate in Mexico and other nations of the Americas. Indigenous people outside of indigenous communities, who do not speak an indigenous language, and who do not conform to specific cultural expectations, tend to be denied indigenous identity, whether in popular or scholarly circles. In a sense, non-conforming indigenous people become invisible, at times even an invisible majority. In the colonial period, as in the present, the official record does not always correspond to people's perceived identities. In fact, indigenous identity has managed

to survive despite consistent attempts to undermine it since the colonial period and in Mexico and other nations in the Americas, a revival of indigenous identity is already underway.

CONCLUSION

Walking through the streets of downtown Guanajuato today, it would not be difficult to find evidence of its colonial past: breathtaking tunnels, impressive churches, massive stone structures, amazing subterranean streets, astonishing alleys, and, of course, its prolific mines. People visit the city to appreciate all these beautiful reminders of its colonial past and to experience the city's cultural attractions that include *callejoneadas*, *estudiantinas*, street theater performances, and the now international *Festival Cervantino*. All these attractions allow the visitors to reminisce about life in the colonial period, or at least what they imagine life in those times. However, a short bus ride away from this colonial-period paradise live the many people who work tirelessly in the background to make the magic work. Everyday, thousands of people commute from the neighborhoods surrounding downtown Guanajuato to provide all the services needed to make the tourists' stay as fun and as comfortable as possible.

A similar scenario existed during the colonial period. Wealthy people and their families, lived in the city center. Workers who built the impressive structures, who carved the amazing tunnels, and who dug out precious metals from the ground lived on the outskirts of the city or in neighboring towns. Their story is just as colonial as that of the Spanish mine owners or the powerful colonial officials that lived in the city's downtown area. In this dissertation, I have tried to shed some light on their story, the history of the workers, but much remains to be written.

Guanajuato's Zone of Influence

On October 16, 1779, Bernardo Cervantes, representing Guanajuato's *Diputación de Minería*, argued that the mining industry of Guanajuato deserved special treatment from the

Spanish Crown and viceregal authorities of New Spain, considering its significance for the economy of the colony and the Crown, for which reason legislation had been enacted to protect and promote the working of the mines. Cervantes trumpeted the Spanish Crown's good fortune of possessing a great number of wealthy mining centers, much to the envy of other countries. However, Guanajuato was not just any other mining center. Cervantes described how the fortunes of many other centers had fluctuated wildly, with a high level of productivity followed by a complete collapse of production. Other centers had failed altogether. Guanajuato, on the other hand, not only maintained a high level of constant production, it also compensated for production declines in other centers. Many mining centers generated wealth for the Crown, but Cervantes affirmed confidently that Guanajuato was, and would continue to be, the main and most consistent source of mineral wealth. Thus, the mines of Guanajuato deserved the undivided attention and unconditional support of viceregal authorities if it were to continue to generate such great wealth. Cervantes claimed that the discovery of new veins and a considerable surge in production had led to an increase in demand for workers. This demand could not be satisfied with free wage workers from around Guanajuato; rather, it required the collaboration of indigenous communities and Spanish authorities in Michoacán.¹

In particular, Cervantes demanded the re-imposition of the repartimiento labor draft on indigenous communities of Michoacán to secure workers for the mines. He argued that those workers could not be obtained from within Guanajuato's jurisdiction or its nearby *alcaldías mayores*, given the fact that they were already fully employed in the area's enterprises. Cervantes described a vibrant and productive district in the vicinity of Guanajuato, including the mines of Guanajuato and several smaller nearby *reales*—such as Monte de San Nicolás, San Lorenzo, el

¹ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 228v-229, 245.

Peregrino, Trinidad, and Realejo. All were located within 3 leagues of the city, with their own cuadrillas of workers and families. Besides those reales, there were more than forty processing haciendas within ten leagues of Guanajuato, with their own workers. Also, there were communities within Guanajuato's jurisdiction, such as Silao and Marfil, with a combined population of 3,000 families. The town of Irapuato had more than 1,500 families. This demographic increase led to a very high demand for foodstuffs and other commodities. Cervantes estimated that Guanajuato consumed on a yearly basis more than 130,000 cargass of corn, 50,000 cargass of wheat flour, and a similar amount of beans, chilis, chickpeas, and broad beans, as well as 21,000 sheep and 8,000 cows. All this food had to be procured from within the jurisdiction of Guanajuato and nearby *alcaldías mayores*—especially those within the present-day boundaries of the state of Guanajuato: San Miguel el Grande, San Luis de la Paz, León, and Celaya.²

The area around Guanajuato was a very productive agricultural, farming, and mining region, with few workers to spare. When production increased in the Guanajuato mines after the mid-eighteenth century, it led to a shortage that could not be properly addressed by recruiting workers from nearby communities without debilitating the overall regional economic system. Thus, communities from Michoacán could be justifiably tapped to satisfy that need. According to Cervantes, this measure was necessary for many reasons. First, workers from communities in the vicinity of Guanajuato were already working in the mines voluntarily and others were forcibly recruited to do so. This fact reduced the number of potential *repartimiento* workers that could be recruited for the mines. Second, in order to satisfy the 4 percent quota established by the legislation, there would need to be 12,500 idle workers around Guanajuato to meet the demand

² AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 231-232.

of 500 repartimiento workers per month; but as Cervantes insisted, workers in and around Guanajuato were already fully employed in the region's many enterprises. Thus, if workers from the region were recruited for repartimiento labor, agricultural production would fall, a shortage of foodstuffs would follow, and the price of food would increase. Repartimiento and free wage workers alike would abandon the mining center. This scenario led Cervantes to conclude that: "either the mines will not have all the workers they need, or it is necessary to extend the repartimiento to communities of the sierra [Tarasca]." ³ Cervantes lamented that only twenty workers were given to a mine that requested eighty. At that rate, there was no way that the miners' demand for workers could be properly met. Even if the miners received 500 repartimiento workers, it would not be enough. ⁴

The Guanajuato-Michoacán Regional System

Cervantes' description of Guanajuato and its environs provides a vivid image of the regional system on which Guanajuato's mining industry depended. The Guanajuato mining center was not, nor could it be, a self-contained system. I have argued in this dissertation that to properly understand Guanajuato's social, cultural, political, and demographic development throughout the colonial period, it is necessary to do so from a regional perspective. Guanajuato stood at the center of a complicated, multi-layered regional system that included a large number of communities, towns, haciendas, and ranchos in its jurisdiction and nearby *alcaldías mayores*. This regional system also included the Province of Michoacán. Since pre-Hispanic times, regional migrations created strong demographic and cultural links between the present-day states

³ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, ff. 232-233.

⁴ AGN, Minería, 1778, Vol. 148, f. 238v.

of Michoacán and Guanajuato. The arrival of the Spaniards disrupted some of the long-term historical processes that had shaped the region. The Tarascans, who had been gaining ground in the southern part of the state of Guanajuato for many years, had to retreat to deal with the threat of the incoming Spaniards and their indigenous allies. Once the Tarascans were incorporated into the colonial system and joined Spaniards as auxiliaries in their expeditions to the north, they became a key component in the eventual pacification, colonization, and population of Guanajuato. This population movement further strengthened economic and demographic links between the present-day states of Michoacán and Guanajuato, which I have argued constituted a region—what I have called the Guanajuato-Michoacán region.

The regional system described in this dissertation remained in place until the end of the colonial period. However, by the late eighteenth century, a fracture between Guanajuato and Michoacán was visible. Michoacán's elite groups resented Guanajuato's domination and they defended what they considered their own zone of influence. I was not able to explore fully the rift that occurred at the end of the colonial period; it is an important topic that remains to be studied, one that could provide much information about the region's elite groups, their competition for the available labor force, and the ways in which this competition affected indigenous communities. I touched only briefly on connections between the mining industries of Guanajuato and Michoacán. Both places possessed important mining centers that had a significant impact on the region's population. The mining industries of both districts exerted profound social, political, and economic pressures on indigenous communities of the region. These pressures can help us understand the many factors that pushed and pulled populations from indigenous communities to towns, cities, haciendas, ranchos, and mining centers.

Labor Systems and Repartimiento

New Spain's wealth was located as much in its mines as it was in its labor force. Without labor, the coveted precious metals of the mines could not be extracted. New Spain's economic system depended on developing mechanisms to mobilize and manipulate the available labor force.⁵ Initially, encomenderos and other Spanish colonists and indigenous principales controlled an important segment of the available labor force.⁶ Eventually, viceregal authorities adopted measures and laws to oversee this valuable resource. Slowly, at first, viceregal authorities took steps to create a system that would satisfy the region's labor demands while consolidating control of the labor force. This process took some time, documented in decrees that were designed to ensure that viceregal authorities possessed the power and authority to regulate labor. Encomenderos, local Spanish authorities, Spanish colonists, and indigenous principales were forced to comply with the viceroy's attempt to consolidate royal authority.⁷ The attempt to regulate all these groups was not always successful, however, as some ignored or subverted viceregal orders. Colonial authorities sometimes sought to punish offenders, but their control remained imperfect at best. In many cases, indigenous communities suffered the consequences, since they were required to meet the labor demands of multiple groups, often above and beyond their required quotas. By the end of the sixteenth century, a well-developed coerced labor system, known as repartimiento or *sistema de tandas*, had been established.

⁵ Van Young, *Hacienda and Market*, xlvi.

⁶ Understanding, of course, that there are always labor negotiations between individuals that escape control by the authorities, either Spanish or indigenous. The most direct control of labor was imposed on sedentary populations that could be properly accounted for and that had pre-existing forms of organizing and assigning labor. That applied, for instance, to sedentary populations in central Mexico and Michoacán, but could not be properly employed in places further north without the necessary sociopolitical organization.

⁷ It is worth clarifying that viceregal control of the labor force was and could only be partial. While repartimiento did give authorities more direct control over this valuable resource, their main form of control was through the power of regulation, used to oversee and discipline both workers and employers.

The repartimiento system satisfied the labor demands of Guanajuato's miners in the short and long term. In the short term, repartimiento labor provided workers to miners on a temporary, rotational basis. This system allowed workers to continue to live in their communities, and only to provide service to the mines on one-week, two-week, four-week, or six-week turns of service. This arrangement was useful to the miners since they not only benefited from a robust labor force in the Province of Michoacán, but they did so at a much-reduced rate, compared to free wage workers. However, as I have argued, this system also led to long-term migrations from Michoacán to Guanajuato. Going to Guanajuato on temporary, forced turns of service was a big burden both on individuals and the communities to which they belonged. Thus, many of them simply decided to emigrate to one of the many communities, haciendas, or ranchos near the mines, where they could still participate in the mining economy on their own terms, rather than face the possibility of having to serve in the mines again.

The repartimiento was a coercive labor system, and most communities resented their forced participation in the system. However, it involved a certain level of negotiation and accommodation, which indigenous communities used to mitigate some of the worst aspects of that system. Also, indigenous communities in Michoacán used the rotational nature of the repartimiento system to transport and sell merchandise from their communities in monthly open-air markets that were reserved for them in Guanajuato. In the eighteenth century, the Bourbon Reforms altered relations between indigenous communities and the viceregal government. Spanish officials became more authoritative and less willing to accommodate the needs and interests of indigenous communities. The fiscal and administrative reforms led to social tensions and conflict throughout many parts of Spanish America, and in the Guanajuato-Michoacán region.

Several factors led to a severe labor shortage in Guanajuato after the mid-eighteenth century that, according to the miners, would ruin the mining industry in that city if necessary measures were not taken. Their suggestion was to intensify the repartimiento labor draft that had existed in the region from the end of the sixteenth century to the first half of the eighteenth century. Although Guanajuato's miners still relied on repartimiento workers in the mid-eighteenth century, the number of those workers had decreased significantly by that time. Nonetheless, Guanajuato's miners considered this institution as a useful one that they could reactivate when needed. Indigenous communities in Michoacán, and even Michoacán's Spanish colonists and authorities, attempted to thwart this imposition. The conditions that had made it possible to establish the repartimiento system in the middle of the sixteenth century no longer applied. Neither indigenous communities nor Michoacán's Spanish population would participate in a system that provided little or no benefit to them. This shift led to the eventual demise of repartimiento in the region.

In this dissertation, I have explored general aspects of the repartimiento system over a long period of two hundred years. A more thorough study is necessary. The claim by historians that repartimiento did not play a significant role in New Spain has discouraged a full study of the system; in contrast, in the Andes, historians have examined the infamous *mita* in great detail. The dominant narrative has established that free wage labor was the norm in Guanajuato, and that mine workers were properly compensated. That narrative may have applied to many workers, but there were also many unwilling indigenous workers recruited and retained by force, whether by repartimiento or debt peonage.⁸

⁸ It is important to point out that overtly coercive forms of labor recruitment were important mechanisms used throughout the colonial period, but less obvious, structural economic and political mechanisms, like land dispossession, were also utilized and could be as effective, or even more effective, than direct forms of coercion.

Indigenous Ethnic Identity and the Ideology of Mestizaje in Guanajuato

In the present-day downtown area of Irapuato, there are two important landmarks of the city. One of them is the *Templo del Hospitalito* (see figure 1). This structure is the remaining temple of the Tarascan colonial-period hospital and *cofradía de Nuestra Señora de la Misericordia*. The temple dates to the foundation of the town in the mid-sixteenth century and speaks to the early, and important, presence that Tarascans had in the *congregación de Irapuato*. The location of the temple in the heart of the city and its permanence after more than four hundred years, is a testimony to the importance of the structure in Irapuato's history. Right next to the *Templo del Hospitalito* is a mural called "Orígenes de Irapuato" (Irapuato's Origins) by muralist Salvador Almaraz López (see figure 2). The mural contains all the basic elements that promote the mestizo ideology so prevalent in Mexican history. On the left side, it portrays the indigenous contribution and on the right side it portrays the Spanish contribution. In the middle is a stylized, three-faced image of *mestizaje*, with an indigenous woman facing left, a Spanish woman facing right, and a mestiza woman in the middle, looking straight at the observer. Above them is a man—most likely a representation of *mestizaje*, as well—raising his arms. From his left arm, corn is sprouting, and from his right arm, wheat is sprouting, symbolizing indigenous and European contributions to the creation of a mestizo offspring.

The juxtaposition of these two important landmarks of Irapuato (see figure 3) represents the uneasy relationship between an indigenous presence and the ideology of *mestizaje*, not only in Irapuato and Guanajuato, but throughout Mexico. The temple, and some of the religious celebrations associated with it, testifies to the important presence that indigenous people, especially the Tarascans, had in Irapuato. However, that presence was challenged as early as the seventeenth century, throughout the eighteenth century, and especially after Independence and

the Revolution, when the ideology of mestizaje required the erasure of an indigenous presence. The mural speaks to how Mexico's indigenous history has been appropriated by the ideology of mestizaje. In the process, it has relegated indigenous people to an indeterminate past, negating an indigenous presence in what was first considered a Spanish space, and then became a mestizo space.

The history of Guanajuato is intertwined with the development of the mining industry and all economic activities associated with this industry. Mines, haciendas, ranchos, estancias, and labores—all contributed to the demographic growth of Guanajuato's mining center and the



Figure 1: Templo del Hospitalito, Irapuato, Guanajuato. (Photographed by author)



Figure 2: "Orígenes de Irapuato" Mural, Irapuato, Guanajuato. (Photographed by author)



Figure 5: Templo del Hospitalito and "Orígenes de Irapuato" Mural, Irapuato, Guanajuato. (Photographed by author)

surrounding area. This intense economic activity attracted a continuous flow of people to the Bajío, making it one of the most densely populated regions in Mexico by the end of the colonial period. People of different ethnic/racial groups came together to work in the mines, haciendas, and other enterprises, contributing with their presence to important demographic and cultural changes. These changes have often been interpreted as a process of mestizaje, and its outcome a predominantly mestizo society. However, documentary evidence suggests a different reality. Even at the very end of the colonial period, indigenous people maintained a strong presence all throughout Guanajuato. Indigenous people constituted the backbone of the labor force for Guanajuato's mining industry from the beginning of the colonial period, and continued to do so by the end of the colonial period. The fact that they worked with other groups, lived in urban spaces, and often "acculturated" has led to the erroneous conclusion that they were not there. And even if they were there, they were not truly, or fully, indigenous.

The idea that indigenous people who do not live in indigenous communities, who do not speak an indigenous language, and who do not dress in a particular way, are not truly indigenous is still a very prevalent view in Mexico and throughout Latin America. In several nations of Latin America, people of indigenous ancestry constitute the vast majority of the population, but somehow census information portrays them as a very small, insignificant minority. As I have argued, indigenous people are the invisible majority. In the colonial period, as in the present, the official record does not always reflect people's self-ascribed identities. In this dissertation I have tried to address some of the reasons why indigenous identity in Guanajuato has been historically undermined and even denied.

If I have documented some of the ways in which indigenous people lived and worked in Guanajuato, much remains to be done to understand "indigenous spaces" in Guanajuato: Where

did indigenous groups prefer to live? How did people organize themselves? How did contact with other groups affect their culture, and vice versa? How can we understand how indigenous culture changed over time? Did acculturation necessarily lead to a loss in indigenous identity? Ongoing studies of Guanajuato's *repúblicas de indios* in the *alcaldías mayores* of León and Celaya promise to address some of these questions.⁹ However, indigenous spaces were more than just *repúblicas de indios*; even when not organized in this way, indigenous people lived and worked in haciendas, ranchos, towns, and mining centers. Locating and documenting their presence in these more traditionally Spanish spaces—later mestizo spaces—is an important task that remains to be addressed. Finally, Tarascans and Otomíes played a key role in the colonization and population of Guanajuato. Their presence in many towns throughout the Bajío is well-documented. Some scholars have already examined the presence of these two groups, but a more thorough analysis of their living and working arrangements, their cooperation and competition within shared spaces, is worth considering.¹⁰ The eventual erosion of specific ethnic identities, and the emergence of a more homogenous “indio” identity, also needs to be examined. Did new overarching identities open up possibilities of solidarity and cooperation among indigenous men and women who encountered similar colonial challenges?

⁹ See, for instance, José Tomás Falcón Gutiérrez “Los pueblos de indios de la alcaldía mayor de León. La república de naturales y sus conflictos por la tierra y el agua, 1630-1790 (Master’s thesis, El Colegio de Michoacán, 2003); and “El pueblo de indios de San Francisco de Acámbaro. Evolución territorial y política, 1540-1690” (Ph.D. dissertation, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, in progress).

¹⁰ The work carried out by Carlos Paredes Martínez exploring the Tarascan diaspora in Guanajuato is as yet unparalleled. He is currently exploring the long-term migrations and settlements of Tarascans in Guanajuato. David Wright has done a lot of work documenting Otomí migrations to Guanajuato during the colonial period and the broader indigenous presence in the state of Guanajuato.

Concluding Remarks

This dissertation examines the participation of indigenous workers in the colonial mining industry of the Guanajuato-Michoacán region, and the impact that this industry had on them and their communities of origin. I explore a complex regional system that evolved over the course of the sixteenth century to satisfy an increasing demand for workers in the Guanajuato mines and its agricultural industry. The region's mining industry created a very competitive labor market in which mine owners used different strategies to recruit and retain a labor force. Although free wage labor was broadly utilized by mine owners, other less free labor institutions were used, as well, including slavery, *encomienda*, *repartimiento*, and debt peonage. These systems put considerable pressure on indigenous communities of the region to provide the bulk of the labor force. Ultimately, my goal in this dissertation is to highlight the important role that indigenous men and women played in the mining industry of the Guanajuato-Michoacán region and the ways in which they adapted, reacted, and resisted the demands and impositions of the mining industry.

GLOSSARY

Alcalde Ordinario:	Municipal magistrate
Alcaldía Mayor:	Administrative district
Alguacil:	Bailiff
Alhóndiga:	Grain market
Altepetl:	Indigenous ethnic state
Arrendatario:	Leaseholder
Asentista:	Contractor
Audiencia Real:	High Court of justice
Balcarrota:	A type of haircut in which locks of hair hang on both sides of the face, while the rest of the head is shaved
Barreteros:	Pick men
Braza:	Length measurement, about 6 feet
Cabecera:	Head town
Cantor:	Singer
Conductor Personero:	Assigned guide, usually to lead workers to work sites
Cabildo:	Town council
Caja de Comunidad:	Community coffer
Callejoneadas:	Street tours
Cazonci:	Pre-Hispanic ruler of Michoacán, also known as Irecha
Cofradía:	Religious confraternity
Corregidor:	District magistrate

Corregimiento:	Administrative unit under jurisdiction of a Corregidor
Costumbre:	Custom. Legally, an established practice
Criollo:	Spaniard born in the Americas
Cuadrilla:	Work crew, often residents in mine towns
Encomendado:	Encomienda Indians
Encomendero:	Holder of an encomienda
Encomienda:	A grant of labor and tribute from Indigenous communities to the person receiving the encomienda, usually a Spaniard.
Escribano público real:	Public royal notary
Estudiantinas:	Student music groups dressed in European renaissance-period garments
Estancia:	Private landholding devoted to livestock
Ethnogenesis:	Birth or rebirth of ethnic identities
Fanega:	Measure of dry weight, about 1.5 bushels
Gobernatura:	Indigenous governorships
Hacendado:	Hacienda owner
Hacienda:	A large rural landed estate
Hospital:	Colonial period institution designed to provide general forms of assistance, including healthcare
Indio ladino:	Spanish-speaking or acculturated indigenous person, could also refer to an acculturated indigenous person
Indios repartidos:	Repartimiento workers
Intendencia:	Intendancy, administrative district under the charge of an intendant

Intendente Corregidor:	Intendant, official in charge on an intendencia
Irecha:	Pre-Hispanic ruler of Michoacán, also known as Cazonci
Juez de Tandas:	Repartimiento judge
Juez repartidor:	Repartimiento judge
Labor:	Farmland
Merced:	A land grant.
Mestizaje:	Process by which a population becomes increasingly of mestizo origin.
Mestizo:	Generally understood as a person of mixed Spanish and indigenous ancestry, but was often used generically to refer to people of mixed ancestry.
Metales:	Mercury poisoning
Mita:	Forced labor draft
Mitayos:	Mita workers
Oficiales de república:	Indigenous town officials
Pindecuario:	Accounting books, called “book of customs”
Residencia:	Judicial review of an outgoing official
Sementera:	Sown land
Partido:	Share in the ore produced in a mine
Pepena:	Share in the ore produced in a mine
Provisión Real:	Royal decree
Presidio:	Military fort
Principal:	Indigenous leader in a community
Rancho:	Often understood as a small rural landed property, it could also refer to small settlements, scattered

	settlements. Also called <i>rancherías</i> .
Real:	Coin, worth one eighth of a peso
Regidor:	Municipal councilman
Repartimiento:	A forced labor draft used to recruit workers from indigenous communities on a rotational turn of service, also known as <i>sistema de tandas</i> .
Repartimiento de bienes:	A forced distribution of goods on credit to indigenous communities, often on unfavorable terms.
República de indios:	Indigenous town government
Sargento Mayor:	Sergeant major
Serrano:	Upland people
Sistema de Tandas:	A forced labor draft used to recruit workers from indigenous communities on a rotational turn of service, also known as <i>repartimiento</i> .
Sujeto:	Subject town
Suma humedad:	Pulmonary diseases
Tameme:	Carrier
Tenatero:	Ore carrier
Teniente de Alcalde Mayor:	Provisional lieutenant
Tequíó:	Production quota
Tanda:	Turn of service
Tantzita:	Worker on a tanda; repartimiento worker
Tenencia:	Administrative subdivision of a corregimiento or alcaldía mayor
Vara (measurement):	About one yard
Yanaconas:	Independent indigenous workers in the Andes

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AGEG	Archivo General del Estado de Guanajuato, Guanajuato
APG	Archivo Parroquial Basílica Colegiata de Ntra. S. de Guanajuato, Guanajuato
AHMI	Archivo Histórico Municipal de Irapuato, Irapuato
AHMM	Archivo Histórico Municipal de Morelia, Morelia
ACM	Archivo Casa de Morelos, Morelia
AMP	Archivo Municipal de Pátzcuaro, Pátzcuaro
AGN	Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City
AHPM	Archivo Histórico del Palacio de Minería, Mexico City

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