

The Nature of the Conquest and the Conquistadors

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Summary. The opening gold-plundering phase of the Conquest in the Caribbean was succeeded by the in-depth conquest and settlement of Central and South America. Fired by the crusading legacy of the Reconquest of Spain from the Moors, the conquistadors' military, organizational, entrepreneurial and diplomatic skills, powers of endurance, and technological superiority facilitated conquest of fragmented Indian societies. To this must be added the impact of diseases, the evangelizing success of the missionaries, and the siring of a new race of mixed blood. Although the centralized, agriculture-based Aztec and Inca empires quickly fell to the conquistadors and their Indian allies, nomadic hunting, gathering and jungle tribes remained unconquered for centuries. Elsewhere in the Americas, absence of gold and silver and of a sedentary labour force resulted in different forms of societies. In French Canada, fur-trapping needed Indian co-operation; in New England family farms excluded Indian participation; in Brazil, Virginia and the Caribbean absence of Indian labour to harvest tropical staples led to the African slave trade. Whereas in Spanish America the conquistador was the culture hero, in Canada it was the *coureur du bois*, in New England the Puritan farmer, and in Brazil the *bandeirante*, explorer and pathfinder of the heartland of South America.

THE MORE THAT IS WRITTEN about the Conquest the more puzzling it becomes. It still perhaps poses the greatest of challenges to the historian to explain how a handful of adventurers could subdue mighty empires

geared to war. It is difficult to comprehend just how original an enterprise the Conquest was. No European power (except during the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem) had attempted to establish an empire at such a distance. The logistical problems were daunting, and contact with unknown peoples, flora and fauna overturned every established conception (Pagden 1982, 1992). It is scarcely surprising that Spanish historiography should have concentrated on the golden heroic age of Spanish expansion ignoring, until recently, the period of post-imperial malaise.

Within a century an area over 50 times the size of Castile had been claimed for the Spanish Crown. Earlier generations were content to marvel at these superhuman feats. One Englishman who tried to emulate them, Sir Walter Raleigh, commented:

I cannot forbear to commend the patient virtue of the Spaniards. We seldom or never find that any nation hath endured so many misadventures and miseries as the Spaniards have done in their Indian discoveries; yet persisting in their enterprises with invincible constancy, they have annexed to their kingdom so many goodly provinces to bury the remembrance of all dangers past. Tempests and shipwrecks, famine, overthrows, mutinies, heat and cold, pestilence and all manner of diseases both old and new, together with extreme poverty and want of all things needful have been the enemies wherewith every one of their most noble discoveries at one time or another hath encountered (Clissold 1954:8).

Marvelling at the conquistadors' exploits now tends to be out of fashion, in spite of Bernal Díaz's inimitable chronicle (Díaz del Castillo 1963). Contemporary attitudes are more likely to be influenced by those long-term consequences of the Conquest to which are attributed many of the ills of Latin America. Europeans, and especially Spaniards, have to bear the burden of the legacies of the defilers of pre-Columbian innocence. There is still no statue of Hernán Cortés in Mexico and the "battle of the bones" in 1946, during the polemic which followed the discovery of the reputed bones of Cortés, was indicative of the fierce passions which his memory still arouses, in spite of being the founder of the Mexican nation. Dominating the rest of the conquistadors, he embodied their virtues and defects. All the greed, contradictions of the age, rootlessness, the mingling of military and entrepreneurial qualities, the lust for recognition, his ostentation and prodigality, co-existed with a vision of empire which marks him off from all other conquistadors—most strikingly from Francisco Pizarro whose baleful legacy convulsed Peru in civil war.

The conquistadors still bear the blame for being the begetters of vices and behaviour patterns, such as *caudillismo* and *machismo*, which were to burden later generations. They also are the ancestors of many of the contemporary ruling classes throughout the continent. Nowhere, perhaps,

is this more apparent than in Central America where a recent study, based on detailed genealogical analysis, has shown how ruling elites throughout that region can trace their ancestry back to the original conquistadors. By means of inter-marriage this elite has created an identity of interests which transcends national boundaries, monopolizing power in many cases from the Conquest until the present (Stone 1990).

Instead of bequeathing the benefits, if such they be, of modernity the Conquest perpetuated medieval attitudes and so condemned Hispanic America to backwardness and underdevelopment. Whereas independence for North America ushered in a new dawn, in Spanish America it ushered in the twilight years. In this view Spain was, in the words of Simón Bolívar, not the *madre* but the *madrastra*.

The Spaniards, then, have had to bear the brunt of opprobrium (at least until the burgeoning Atlantic slave trade of the eighteenth century created new demons) for the consequences of European settlement in the New World.

Europeans' Interest in the Americas and Early Reactions

How distinctive was the Spanish experience compared with that of other European powers? It must be remembered that the Spaniards, being first in the field, pre-empted the richest territories, albeit by accident rather than design, as with so much else in the Spanish experience in the Americas. If the search for El Dorado proved elusive, the richness of Potosí and Zacatecas were merely the first of the great silver cities to yield precious metals once the sources of gold had dried up.

It was the tangible evidence of mineral wealth rather than limitless land which was to draw Spaniards to the New World, attracted by the tales of returnees and even by enthusiastic letters (Lockhart and Otte 1976), so that by the end of the sixteenth century between 200,000 and one-quarter of a million had emigrated to the Indies, with a possible further 200,000 in the first half of the seventeenth century. Peasants did not go to perpetuate their peasantry—hence the early difficulties of persuading colonists to settle the land and become “yeomen” farmers (Sánchez-Albornoz 1984).

Other European powers were motivated by similar desires (except for the Puritans and their successors), but very soon had to be content with trying to find those exotic commodities that Richard Hakluyt believed could be the foundation of England's colonial wealth (Parks 1961). Only in Brazil, and then not until the very end of the seventeenth century, was gold in quantity finally discovered, to be shortly followed by diamonds.

The Spaniards alone were the heirs to hierarchically structured centralized, priestly, agricultural tribute societies, with high population densities which could provide a supply of labour, even taking into account the demographic disasters of the first century of settlement (Newson, this volume). Elsewhere in the Americas labour had to be supplied either by family labour, by indenture, by the forced labour of convicts or *degradados* or, once plantation societies developed, by African slaves. Elsewhere, the native American populations were hunters and gatherers, often inhabiting dense woodlands. Organized in many tribal groupings, they were elusive and reluctant to be tamed. Colonists experienced difficulty in identifying where power lay in these societies and hence found it a difficult business to negotiate with them. Being societies where inter-relationships depended on present-giving and a barter economy, a different scale of relationships had to be established, taking long and convoluted negotiations (Jacobs 1967). Unpredictable to Europeans in their behaviour, Indians posed problems which long postponed any final conquest until the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890.

The difference between Spaniards and the rest is illustrated by nomenclature. The use of the word "Conquest" is unique to the Spanish case—for two reasons. Firstly, the subjugation of the Aztec and Inca empires, which has hitherto attracted the widest attention of historians, was clear-cut and irrevocable, symbolized by the death of Montezuma (Motecuhzoma) and Atahualpa. There were after-revolts—Cuauhtemoc in Mexico, the revolt of 1536 and of Inca claimants in Peru—but in practical terms the heartlands of the two great empires were subdued. Secondly, "Conquista" echoes "Reconquista", with the latter being a model of the former, carrying over into the Indies the values which had sustained the crusade against the Moors. The coincidence of the termination of the 700 year Reconquista with the capture of Granada, the last Moorish kingdom in Spain, with the "discovery" of the Indies encouraged a providentialist view of Spain's crusading mission. The values underpinning the Reconquista and the conquest of the Canary Islands (Fernández Armesto 1987), and also their organizational forms, were to be replicated in the Indies during the early decades of the Conquest.

The history of the Conquest is that of the gradual replacement of the habits and traditions bequeathed by the hit-and-run plundering frontier raids of the Reconquista, by the conquest and "civilizing" of conquered tribes in long term settlement of vast tracts of territory, some of it virtually uninhabited. For genuine conquest there must be settlement and, although the Reconquista involved settling lands from which the Moors had been cleared, the traditions of frontier warfare (recalled in ballads), still exercised a potent fascination during the first years of the Conquest.

The unforeseen discovery of gold in Hispaniola subverted Columbus's original Genoese/Portuguese conception of trading entrepôts which underpinned Portuguese expansion to the Far East. Gold and its labour needs dominated the Caribbean phase of the Conquest, in which considerations of settlement and colonisation were subordinated to quick profit from gold-panning using Indian slaves (Sauer 1966). The need for slaves provided the major impetus for exploratory expeditions to Cuba, Puerto Rico, Florida and Central America.

Cuba and Hispaniola provided the springboards for two major thrusts to the mainland. The first of these, to Panama and Central America, and later to Peru, retained many of the plundering characteristics of the Caribbean phase. The second, the expedition to Mexico in 1519, was conditioned by Cortés' view, based on his reaction to the predatory nature of the Caribbean experience, that there could be no conquest without settlement. It was this wider more positive view of conquest which led Cortés to break with Diego de Velásquez, governor of Cuba (and also his superior) who had supported the Mexico expedition for purposes of trade. To justify his disobedience he appealed over Velásquez's head directly to the Emperor, with a grandiose vision of Empire in his famous Five Letters—moving swiftly in order to preempt Velásquez himself being granted the right of conquest (Cortés 1986; Elliott 1984a).

There was little comparable to the Spanish view of "imperium" in the experience of other European powers. It has been argued that the conquest of Ireland provided a precedent in the English case (Andrews et al. 1978), and that attitudes towards conquered peoples were carried over from Ireland by the English, and later in the eighteenth century by Ulstermen, who acquired a fearsome reputation as frontiersmen. In the case of the Portuguese the Moors had been expelled much earlier and so the crusading alliance between a military and clerical aristocracy had been blunted, or rather canalized into African expeditions (Boxer 1969). The capture of Ceuta in 1415 presaged the search for the land of Prester John as well as for the source of African gold around Timbuctoo, but overland expeditions were frustrated by geographical intractability. The thalassocratic thrust of Portuguese expansion was to the East, opening up the Indian ocean, Southern Asia and the Far East—other "new worlds" but not in that particular sense of strangeness and novelty engendered by the Americas. Until the discovery of gold in the late seventeenth century, Brazil was not central to Portuguese colonial thinking, nor in the case of France is there anything comparable to the Spanish experience. In spite of the colonial ambitions of Francis I, reflected in royal support of expeditions, France was deeply divided by the Wars of Religion, and much of early French exploration from Brazil to Florida and the St. Lawrence was

undertaken by Huguenots. Nevertheless, although the French Crown subsidized later expeditions the daunting Canadian winter deterred all but the most hardy. Those who adapted best to the country were fur traders and trappers—the *coureurs de bois* who increasingly came to identify with native mores, often conflicting with the attempts of Jesuits to convert Indian tribes. When Québécois historians refer to *La Conquête* they are not referring to the conquest of the Indians but to the conquest of the French by the British in 1759 which they regard as the most important event in Canadian history.

Instead of conquest, therefore, there are, in the case of the Portuguese in Brazil, endless frontier wars of attrition between settlers and Indians which have not yet come to an end (Hemming 1987a). In North America outright conquest was replaced by a complex triangular interplay between, on one side, confederacies of Indian tribes and on the other, the French and British engaging in intricate diplomacy of present-giving, wooing Indian support in their colonial struggle for dominance.

The Periphery: Frontier Wars

However, the contrast between Spain and other European powers should not be too sharply drawn. “Conquest” can only be applied to the heartlands. The real conquest had not really begun by the 1540s. On the periphery of the Spanish empire there were more nomadic, hunting and gathering tribes who, once they obtained the horse (as they did in Southern Chile, the pampas, the Chaco, and Northern Mexico), fought the Spaniards to a standstill, producing a military stalemate until the repeating rifle and revolver tipped the balance against them. The Araucanians were not finally subdued in Southern Chile until the 1880s and the Pampas Indians until the genocidal War of the Desert (1879–85). In Argentina Spanish settlers were confined to a pale around Buenos Aires where the frontier scarcely advanced between the 1580s and 1780s (Tapson 1962). In the North of Mexico the frontier expanded, but only in the face of fierce Indian resistance. Spaniards were the heirs to the hard frontier of the Aztecs who had failed to subdue the nomadic Chichimecs who fought to defend their gathering grounds “as if they were the Moors of Granada” (Armillas 1969). Once the Indians had acquired a taste for cattle, a relief from desert rat, the Spaniards were exposed to constant raids by tribes whose ritual cannibalism and indiscriminate torture struck terror into potential settlers. The threat which these Indians posed to the mines of Zacatecas, opened up in the 1540s, forced the Spaniards into a ruthless 40-year war in which military conquest proved impossible (Powell 1952). In the end the Chichimecs were pacified only by a policy of conciliation. Further North

there was no way in which the tribes of the Gran Apachería could be subdued until the campaigns of the US Army crushed them and Geronimo was finally captured (Spicer 1962; Forbes 1960). In the case of Yucatan, conquest was only achieved after a relentless guerrilla war of 40 years duration (Clendinnen 1987).

More striking still were the failures to subdue jungle Indians, as the fate of numerous expeditions in search of the elusive El Dorado in Venezuela and Colombia show (Hemming 1978b). Where the horse was useless, where the famed Toledo steel sword could not be wielded, and where arquebuses and crossbows were no match for poisoned arrows and stealthy ambush, the lot of conquistadors was one of death by thirst and in the agony of poisoned arrow wounds. In the indeterminate frontier region of the upper reaches of the Amazon, Spaniards encountered similar resistance as had the Portuguese in Brazil. This was the Antisuyo of the Incas, which they also had failed to subdue. What the conquistadors could not achieve, missionaries would later attempt.

One of the notable features of the Spanish empire was its unmilitary nature—especially striking in view of later nineteenth century experience after independence. Barracks and garrisons were symbols of the independent period of later American history. The castles of Reconquista Spain were not to be replicated in the Americas. There were only the palisaded forts on the Bio-Bio and Maule frontier in Southern Chile (Jara 1961; León 1990), or guarding the ditches which surrounded the Buenos Aires pale, or the presidios of Northern Mexico. Fortresses were later to be built to guard Caribbean sea routes against the depredations first of European pirates and their navies—the Morro in Havana, San Juan in Puerto Rico, Vera Cruz, Barranquilla. There was no military establishment as such: defence was a matter of *encomienda* levies or locally recruited militias and few of the bureaucrats sent out to the Indies were professional soldiers until the eighteenth century when an incipient militarization, forced by sharpening colonial rivalries, made it necessary. The contrast with North America could not be greater, where Franco/British conflict necessitated large military establishments, fortresses like Louisburg and the ring of French forts encircling the British colonies. In the case of the British, the consequent civil-military tensions were to be one cause of the War of Independence. What needs to be explained is why and how Spaniards were able to dominate the heartland, and to impose a *Pax Hispánica* for some 250 years.

Explanations for Spanish Success and Indian Defeat

Explanations have focused on the structural weaknesses of Aztec and Inca societies, on the hesitations and superstitions of Montezuma and Atahualpa

and on the influence of portents such as comets and earthquakes creating a presumed psychological predisposition to defeatism. Others have stressed technological backwardness such as the absence of the wheel, the lack of iron, and writing—although this may have been given an exaggerated importance due to a Eurocentric overestimation of the significance of literacy. However, it is difficult not to exaggerate the significance of internal divisions within these two societies, or the resentments of subject tribute-paying tribes, resentments which were exploited by the Spaniards so that their Indian allies conquered other Indians. Much has been made too of the internal conflicts within the Inca ruling clan and of the feuding which followed the pre-conquest collapse of the Quiche Kingdom in Central America. Other additional explanations are sought in the rigidity of the native mind as, for example, in their limited concept of war (similar to the contemporary wars of the Italian city states, when prisoners were taken with a view to ransom though not for sacrifice).

On the Spanish side explanations focus on hispanic ruthlessness, on European technological superiority, especially in weaponry, diplomatic skill, entrepreneurial drive and on the mobility given them by the horse. Emphasis has also been laid on the organization of the conquistador bands which echoed those of the Reconquista and which had proved in Iberia, as in the Americas, to be a flexible instrument during the initial stages of conquest (Góngora 1975). These bands were organized under a caudillo who recruited his followers on a voluntary basis after receiving State authorization. Future rights over lands to be conquered were granted: rules were drawn up to distribute booty of which one-fifth went to the Crown: *Adelantados* were appointed by the Crown and were obliged to finance the conquests in return for a percentage of profits. Bands were partnerships among leading participants who shared initial costs, whilst many of the followers formed partnerships among themselves. Much depended on the personal bonds thus formed, either on a familial or more probably a regional basis. The replication of regional loyalties carried over from Spain to the Indies, which was to be such a distinctive feature of later Spanish immigration, finds an early expression among the conquistadors. When divisions occurred, as they often did, most notably in Peru, over disappointed expectations about the division of the spoils, they tended to be along the lines of residual regional loyalties.

Much has been made of the Spaniards' superiority in weaponry, with their arquebusses, crossbows, cannons, armour and above all the steel sword, pitted against opponents whose bows lacked the penetrating power of the European longbow or the metal arrows of the crossbow (Hemming 1970). However, once the initial impact of strangeness had worn off, superiority in weaponry tended to diminish. Arquebusses were heavy;

cannons were clumsy, cumbersome and slow to reload, exposed to wet and dependent on a regular powder supply. The armour was varied, as illustrations show. Some, in the elaborate new Maximilian style, was unsuited to American conditions, as in the case of the horseman who suffocated in his armour under the strain of fleeing from the enemy. To avoid this problem, some Spaniards adopted the padded cloth armour of the Aztecs.

Fierce mastiffs, trained for slave-catching, always retained their terror. Horses too were a crucial factor, as they gave Spaniards mobility so long as Indians did not possess them. But in heavily wooded country or in narrow passes, or when unshod or lacking fodder, the horse became a hindrance. Nevertheless, the importance of the horse was reflected in the fact that the major social division among conquistadors was between those possessing a horse and those who did not, with horsemen always receiving double share of the spoils.

The “Men of Cajamarca”

Lack of detailed research on the conquistadors has encouraged broad generalizations about them, perpetuating stereotypes. By far the most detailed and sophisticated analysis, that by James Lockhart of conquistadors in Peru, brings out the wide diversity of their social origins and shows conclusively that they were not the illiterate freebooters of legend, nor footloose mercenaries (Lockhart 1972). We cannot generalize from the illiterate Pizarro brothers (Hernando excepted). Lockhart's sample, concentrating on the 168 Spaniards present at the capture of Atahualpa at Cajamarca in 1532, shows that they came from every region in Spain (excepting the Aragonese kingdom) and that they were drawn from all social classes, reflecting a wide variety of professions and crafts. “Their main strength”, he concludes, “numerically and qualitatively was in capable, literate commoners, lower-rank professionals, and marginal hidalgos”. The sample may be small, but in the absence hitherto of wider samples it can serve as an indication (Morales Padrón 1992). It is not so much an exercise in rehabilitation as of attempting to understand a group whom, he argues, have suffered the condescension of those who have not taken the trouble to do so. He is particularly insistent in repudiating the use of the word “soldier” or “troops”. There is no demarcation between soldier and civilian. All men were fighters: they had to be. The word “soldier” does not appear often in sixteenth century usage, either in the way conquistadors refer to each other, or in the early chroniclers. Whatever the many divisions among the conquistadors themselves, they

were not those of military versus civilian so much as those between early- and late-comers, or between the dependents of rival groups who felt they had been inadequately rewarded. Throughout Hispanic America, in the period of consolidation and bureaucratization, there was, however, to be a distinction between those who had borne the brunt of campaigning and those who came later to control, adjudicate and to administer. Especially resented were the *Visitass* to investigate complaints. Even the most powerful were not exempt, as in the case of Cortés, who was investigated by Ponce de León.

Very few of the Men of Cajamarca had had any direct European military experience. The only professional soldier was the Greek artilleryman Pedro de Candia. However, half the sample were veterans of the Indies. The proportion of soldiers was probably higher among the earlier conquistadors—for example, Pedrarias de Avila, noted for his ferocity, had been a veteran of the Granada and African Wars, and Francisco de Carvajal, the “terror of the Andes”, and a ruthless, pitiless fighter, had served in Italy, being present at the battle of Pavia and at the Sack of Rome. Of 93 conquistadors in the list of *Encomenderos* in Panama studied by Mario Góngora, one half were soldiers or sailors: the rest were peasants, artisans or from professional classes (Góngora 1962). Cortés himself had intended to fight under the Gran Capitán Gonzálo de Córdoba in Italy, the prestigious career for all aspiring hidalgos, but finally chose not to do so. In making this choice, he was to choose, like other conquistadors, a path which involved far more than merely fighting in the highly disciplined tercios. Conquistadors had to adapt to strange environments, to face new challenges and to draw on internal reserves of strength.

Of all the social groups represented, hidalgos, the younger sons of the nobility, were the ones whose social ambition was to reflect most closely those of the group as a whole. Although many English colonists among the Puritans were drawn from the lesser gentry, they cannot easily be compared with hidalgos. It is difficult to find parallels to the Spanish nobility elsewhere in Europe, as the demands of constant mobile frontier warfare during the Reconquista meant that free men, not necessarily sons of nobles, could attain noble status by performing a military role. Nobility did not always derive from lineage and birth. Noble privileges could be granted to non-noble freemen, who, as commoner knights, became caballeros. The importance of this warrior nobility over other social groups during the Reconquista cannot be exaggerated. The career of the hero of the *Cantar de Mio Cid* represented the upward social mobility consequent on military success and the spoils of war.

Great were the rejoicings when the Cid Juan Valencia came to the city. Those who have been on foot now become *caballeros* and the gold and the silver who can count it? (McKay 1977:45).

The lure of noble status must have been one magnet attracting migrants to the Indies, but in practice few *hidalguías* were granted by the Crown. Among the conquistadors those first in the field expected recompense from the King, but very rarely did this mean grants of nobility. Cortés and Pizarro were exceptions in becoming Marquises. *Indianos* were often regarded as nouveaux riches. For those who valued honour and military prowess more than material gain, service in the Italian Wars under the Gran Capitán offered psychological satisfaction which came from belonging to the tercios, the crack troops who came to be feared throughout Europe. To be steeled in the face of military equals brought greater glory than conquering unarmed and debilitated Indians. Also, to serve in Europe meant being closer to the source of power and patronage.

Entradas and the Spread of Conquest

Distribution of the spoils inevitably became a major cause of conflict in the first century of the Conquest. Family, dependents, and regional bonds, uniting leader (*caudillo*) and follower, as well as the obligations of *compradazgo*, inevitably meant the exclusion of those who had made the wrong choice of protector. In Mexico, Cortés discriminated against the followers of Diego Velásquez and in Peru Pizarro's Extremaduran followers were preferred over the Castilians of Diego Almagro. In spite of Almagro's crucial role as the organizer of the expedition, Pizarro and his three brothers' personal obligations overrode those of a purely business partnership. The bitter sense of exclusion felt by the Almagrists resulted in the protracted civil war which raged throughout Peru and finally claimed both Almagro and Francisco Pizarro as its victims (Garcilaso de la Vega 1966).

A major motive behind the *entradas* launched from Mexico and, more particularly, from Peru, was to siphon off the discontented. The *entradas* to Chile, to the Eastern Lowlands and Northern Argentina, were made bearable by mirages of hidden wealth, silver mountains, and those fantasies of legend which could help to assuage the discontent at not receiving an *encomienda*. Without the appreciation of the role which these rainbow illusions played in the motivation of the conquistadors, the rapid geographical expansion of the empire is impossible to understand.

After the overthrow of the Aztec and Inca empires, *entradas* were launched to make further conquests in a leapfrogging process. Unlike the conquest of Mexico, with its coherent leadership and single expedition,

Central America was assailed by numerous bands between 1516 and 1524 coming up from Panama and claiming prior right of conquest over those coming down from Mexico. Pedro de Alvarado moved south to conquer Guatemala and Central America, and Cristóbal de Olid set off to conquer Honduras, joined by Cortés himself. The conquest in Central America was "difficult, destructive, bloody and piecemeal" (McLeod 1973:44). The area was disputed between rival caudillos and it was 20 years before any form of stable government was established. Indian fragmentation paralleled that of the Spaniards. The breakup of the Quiche kingdom into smaller, mutually hostile tribes meant that each had to be conquered piecemeal (McLeod 1973).

Very few conquistadors showed any interest in Central America once the initial gold beds had been exhausted. The region then became a reservoir for slaves and discontented conquistadors, many of whom were to move on to Peru. Lack of co-ordination, bitter rivalries between leaders, and among subordinates over insufficient rewards, destroyed any hope of coherent development until Alvarado moved elsewhere. None of the conquistadors had any interest other than amassing a personal fortune and no interest in organizing a new society. It was only when cacao was discovered to be a profitable crop for an internal Indian market that any coherent planning became possible, coinciding with the arrival in the area of Spanish missionaries, including Las Casas.

Expeditions also fanned out north from Mexico City. Nuñez de Guzman subdued North-West Mexico, founding New Galicia, and Coronado attempted to find the Seven Cities of Cíbola. In Northern South America numerous expeditions fruitlessly searched for El Dorado, whilst Jiménez de Quesada subdued the Chibchas after a hazardous campaign up the Magdalena River. In the far South, Pedro de Valdivia attempted to conquer the Araucanians, although failing to do so as the Incas had before him. Ironically, this failure was the subject of Alonso de Ercilla's *La Araucana* (1569-92), the one great epic poem of the Conquest (Ercilla 1979; Pastor 1992; Pierce 1984).

The geographical sweep of the conquistadors' expeditions (ranging from Coronado's expedition into what is now the Great Plains of North America to Sarmiento de Gamboa's obsession with establishing a fort in Tierra del Fuego guarding the Straits of Magellan) has encouraged the view that the conquistadors were restless wanderers, exemplified in the extraordinary odyssey of Cabeza de Vaca (Nuñez 1891; Bishop 1933; Bolton 1949; Clissold 1954, 1962). To some the "Wanderjahre" was due to frustrated expectations but others were fired by fantasies stemming from legends which had medieval or Amerindian origins (Leonard 1964).

The Conquest officially came to an end in 1550 when the Crown put a

moratorium on further conquests until the debate, raging in Valladolid over the rights and wrongs of the Conquest, came to an end. However, the conquistador ceased to be a conquistador only when he beat his sword into a ploughshare.

For Cortés, atypical in so many ways, conquest was inseparable from settlement, but this was not a view shared by many of his subordinates. Their concern was to “hacer América”, and having made their fortune, which meant acquiring gold, to return to Spain as *Indianos* and to buy social prestige and land. The alternative was to settle down in the Indies with an *encomienda* and to live as semi-feudal lords, or, as Bernal Díaz did, in comparative obscurity. Who stayed and who returned depended on a variety of factors, but a major difference from the English in North America was the original determination of most Spaniards to return to Spain. The absence of women in the early years (they constituted only 6% of all immigrants in the sixteenth century) was not only due to the hazardous nature of the sea crossing, but to the assumed transitory nature of the menfolk’s stay in the Indies. Family migration, common in the case of New England, only came much later in the Spanish empire. For every 150 men entering Massachusetts there were 100 women, although in Virginia the proportion dropped to one woman for every four men. These figures contrast markedly with the rest of Latin America. In Mexico, men outnumbered women by ten to one and in Brazil by 100 to one (McFarlane 1992)—hence the high rate of miscegenation and the credibility of Freyre’s thesis (Freyre 1946). Those women who went to Spanish America unaccompanied, and against whom Bernal Díaz and Garcilaso de la Vega inveighed, did so to make fortunes by marrying old, wealthy *encomenderos*.

Disease: The Key Factor

Determining and affecting all social and economic relationships in the first years of the Conquest was what Murdo McLeod, echoing H. G. Wells, has called “The War of the Worlds”, referring to the devastating diseases brought by Europeans, and against which native Americans, through their isolation, had no immunity (Brothwell and Newson, this volume). The extent of this is well known and has been amply documented as historians, benefitting from ecological and bio-medical studies, now argue that this was the key determinant of the course of conquest (Crosby 1972, 1976). In Mexico the population declined from an estimated 25 million in 1512 to 1.9 million by 1580, and in Peru from 10.0 million in 1530 to 1.5 million by 1590. (Sánchez-Albornoz 1984). McLeod compares America with the Europe of the Black Death, although in Europe there was lacking the

traumatic impact of invasion by a technologically superior and supremely aggressive and self-confident foreign power buoyed up by a supremacist ideology. The psychological impact was as devastating as the medical consequences. Indians were traumatized, finding that their gods had failed them (Wachtel 1977). Although the behaviour of the conquistadors soon belied any impression that they might be gods, their immunity to the diseases they spread gave them a superhuman profile, enabling them to establish a cultural hegemony as well as material domination.

The social and economic consequences were markedly different between the North American and Spanish colonies. By the latter half of the sixteenth century the Conquest in Spanish America had resulted in the destruction of native society, demographically, economically, socially and spiritually. In the French and English colonies the impact of diseases was considerable but patchy. At first in New England the effects were devastating, creating an impression on one witness of a "new found Golgotha" with perhaps a third of the Indian population dying in the vicinity of the earlier settlements, thus opening up the coast for Puritan colonization as well as upsetting the balance between tribes, which was to be a contributory factor in provoking inter-tribal wars (Vaughan 1965). After this early devastation, the depopulation through imported diseases lessened as Western tribes were to remain out of contact with settlers because of the sedentary nature of the early Puritan settlements.

The first effect of population decline during the Caribbean phase of the Conquest was to give an impetus to slave-raiding expeditions to replace the declining labour force. These expeditions underpinned one of the most distinctive features of the early years of the Conquest—that labour was more important than land. Agriculture, except for subsistence, was undervalued. What mattered was labour for panning alluvial gold and for portage. Spaniards demanded grants of Indians in *encomiendas*, or outright slavery until its prohibition in 1550.

The African Dimension

This theme has been studied in detail by Bowser (1974) and Palmer (1976). A major consequence of the decline in the Indian population was the introduction of African slaves, a process which was to saddle the Americas and Africa with a trade which lasted until the latter half of the nineteenth century. Africans had been in contact with Europeans for many centuries before 1492, especially in the Iberian peninsular, and so had acquired immunity to many diseases which Indians did not. Nor were Africans or

slavery novelties in the Iberian peninsula. Ten per cent of Lisbon was of African stock in the fifteenth century and there may have been as many as 100,000 people of slave status in Spain in the mid sixteenth century.

The depopulation of the Caribbean had first encouraged the Spanish Crown to import Africans—a move which Las Casas (himself an owner of domestic African slaves) supported in order to protect Indians. Africans could survive in the *tierra caliente* of the coastlands of Central America and the Caribbean and were considered better workers than Indians in the mines. Without their labour the Mexican and Peruvian economy, as well as the gold-diggings in Cauca in New Granada would have been severely affected.

Africans were to provide the bulk of the labour on sugar plantations, although after the false starts of sugar cultivation in Hispaniola in the 1520s sugar did not expand into becoming the staple crop of the Caribbean until the mid seventeenth century. Nevertheless, African slaves worked in Cortés' sugar plantations in Morelos—as recalled in Rivera's murals in Cortés' palace in Cuernavaca.

At first Africans were imported directly from Spain, through the monopoly system of the *asiento*, a discretionary grant by the Crown, but from 1518 slaves could be imported, principally by the Portuguese and later by the Dutch and English, directly from Africa. In the sixteenth century they were brought to Panama but mainly to Mexico and Peru, where they were employed in the mines, in *obrajes* (textile factories), and as household servants, especially in Lima, where as many as two-thirds of the black population of 30,000 in 1640 may have been concentrated, and where they were ostentatiously displayed as status symbols, and hired out especially by impoverished widows.

One estimate put the total number of slaves in the Indies in 1645 at 329,500, with Peru and Mexico heading the list with approximately 80,000 each, followed by New Granada, with the rest in Panama, Central America and the Caribbean (Palmer, 1976:29). As the mestizo population began to expand in the seventeenth century, and the sugar economy to develop in the Caribbean, so the import of African slaves to the mainland declined. However, in the trough of the demographic collapse in the sixteenth century Africans played a crucial role in the economy, especially in Mexico where the harshness of their treatment encouraged many to become runaways. They not only became a focus for rural rebellions throughout both Spanish and Portuguese America, but in mixing with Indians contributed to the racial complexity of the Americas, to which were to be added a much smaller number of Philippine and even Chinese slaves resulting from Spain's trans-Pacific contacts.

Conquest by Cattle

The role of cattle in the Hispanic New World has been examined by Chevalier (1970) and Crosby (1972). Paralleling the decline in the Caribbean population was the rapid growth of livestock—in fifteen months a herd of cattle doubled. Horses, sheep, pigs which were the Spaniards' staple food, and cattle which provided hides, horn, tallow and meat, brought about widespread dietary and ecological change. The agricultural basis of sedentary Indian societies, relying on their *milpas* (maize fields), was undermined by marauding droves of swine and cattle in the absence of effective fencing. Swine were to be a comparable problem in New England (Cronon 1983). In contrast to Brazil, where sugar plantations were exposed to similar depredations by cattle herds, the political clout of planters enabled them to legislate, forcing cattlemen to fence their pastures. Indians in Mexico had no such redress. Cattle became another weapon in the armoury of conquest as the Indian population continued to decline and livestock expanded—"sheep ate men" in the phrase of the time.

Indian agriculture was labour-intensive, dependent on the digging-stick, whereas Spanish agriculture was labour extensive, with the introduction of the plough (Foster 1960). By the middle of the sixteenth century the balance between land and labour began to change. The age-old conflict between agriculturalists and pastoralists was decided in favour of the latter, as the Spaniards, with their background of cattle ranching in Spain, gave the "lazy industry of stock raising" a central role in the economy. Continuing Indian population decline and the Crown's prohibitions on slavery (although African slaves could be bought for a price) created acute labour shortages. With its low labour demands pastoralism was now a rational choice, the more so as the discovery of silver at Zacatecas and Potosí created a demand for cattle products.

The rapid expansion of cattle put a premium on the possession of horses for roundups. The scarcity value and early exclusivity of the horse broke down as the horse population expanded and as the *vaquero* became an indispensable adjunct of the cattle economy. From this cattle culture stem those characteristics which were to be such a dominant feature of the Hispanic America of later centuries. From this male-dominated society, based on the bond between men united in the face of danger, the quality most admired was *machismo*, based on physical strength, sexual prowess, loyalty, skill with a knife and ability to break horses and fell cattle. To insiders this was "pastoral democracy": to outsiders it was "pastoral despotism" with nomadic cattlemen scorning season-bound agriculturists who did not share their values (Strickon 1965). It was from this social group that many of Latin America's later *caudillos* were to be drawn.

Sexual Conquest

If disease and cattle were key weapons in the Conquest, so also was fornication. The “*hacer la América*” mentality of the conquistadors assuming their return to Spain as “*Indianos*” precluded women accompanying the men. Indian women had no protection against Spanish males who indiscriminately sired a mestizo race who expanded faster than Indians through acquiring immunity to disease. One consequence of indiscriminate mating was to strengthen the double standard in sexual relations and to encourage, as the obverse of *machismo* the development of *marianismo*—the identification of subjected women with the sufferings of the Virgin Mary.

Although some liaisons could be affectionate and lasting, miscegenation produced a marginal population of vagabonds—in the sixteenth century one-sixth of Mexico’s population were considered to be of no fixed abode, inhabiting a penumbral world, and often squatting in and sponging on Indian villages. In Peru, unemployment may have been as high as 50% in the 1550s. Mestizos moved to cattle frontiers, where society was more fluid and birth was no barrier, since skill in herding cattle was the measure of a man’s worth (Hennessy 1978).

The English Example: Land Over Labour

In almost every respect these developments were the antithesis of what was occurring in the English colonies. Although disease also facilitated control, the pace of infection was not so fast because of the more scattered nature of Indian tribes (some of the greatest epidemics did not occur until the nineteenth century). North American Indians suffered comparable traumas, although small tribal societies could withstand culture shock more easily than societies with hierarchical, priestly command structures. They were spared too the devastation of slaving raids. Land was more important than labour, at least in the northern colonies, where subsistence agriculture was based on the family farm. One effect of early Indian population decline was to release land and thus to lessen the possibility of conflict between Indians and settlers until immigration from England began to build up later in the seventeenth century.

In the English experience, as has been suggested, there was no “conquest”: the English regarded themselves as colonists, not as conquerors avid for labour (except in the case of Virginian plantations). The sources of English interest in the Americas were markedly different from those of the Spaniards, and derived mainly from changing international conditions

during Elizabeth's reign, when Spain replaced France as England's major enemy after the outbreak of the Revolt of the Netherlands in 1566. English interest in the Americas was, therefore, partly a response to outside developments and took the form first of trying to tap into the African slave trade and then of raiding and piracy in the Caribbean, though the strategy of cutting Spain's imperial lifeline by occupying Panama failed to materialize (Andrews 1978, 1984). It was the widespread activities and success of English privateers which nurtured a more ambitious policy of trying to emulate Spain by establishing settlements. The English shared the Spanish fascination with gold, but with nothing like the same intensity. Of all the Elizabethan proposers of an imperialist policy Raleigh was the closest to imitating the Spanish conquistadors as was shown in his remarkable writing on Guyana:

Guiana is a country that hath yet her maidenhead, never sacked, turned, nor wrought, the face of the earth hath not been torn, nor the virtue and salt of the soil spent by manurance, the graves not opened for gold, the mines not broken with sledges nor with their images pulled down out of their temples . . . The common soldier shall here fight for gold, and pay himself instead of pence with plates of half a foot broad . . . Those commanders and chieftains, that shoot at honour, and abundance, shall find here more rich and beautiful cities, more temples adorned with golden images, sepulchres filled with treasure, than either Cortes found in Mexico, or Pizarro in Peru (quoted in McFarlane, 1992:41).

But the idea of establishing rival colonies in the Spanish empire died with Raleigh. When interest in colonies revived in the early seventeenth century, the Joint Stock Company (developed in trade with Muscovy, the Levant and the Far East) gave English colonization a commercial character in which the English state played only a minor role.

Nevertheless, there were echoes of a less commercial strain in Virginia, both with Raleigh's early interest and that of his half-brother Sir Humphrey Gilbert who had cut his colonizing teeth in Ireland where his brutality and scorn towards Irish "barbarians", was an ill omen for American colonization (Andrews et al. 1978). His proposal for colonization in America was of a feudal agrarian economy with seigneurial overtones in which no consideration was to be given to the native inhabitants.

Although there has been a considerable English literature on colonization in the late sixteenth century, especially by Richard Hakluyt, there was no official English doctrine of empire, neither in terms of colonization, nor, most significantly, in what attitude should be adopted towards conquered peoples. The commercial nature of English colonization, informed by the desire to increase trade and benefitting from the development of joint stock companies for which there was no exact Spanish

equivalent, stands in stark contrast to the Spanish attitude towards empire, with its echoes of global *imperium*, (and the belief that the Spanish Empire would be the fifth empire prophesied in the Book of Daniel to rule the world), and its emphasis on the centrality of the city and on the evangelizing role of the Church (Phelan 1970).

Cities

The most striking contrast between Spaniards and other Europeans in the Americas was the role assigned to the city in Spain's empire (Morse 1984). Spanish colonial society was urban-oriented, exemplified in bureaucratic centres such as the great Vice-regal capitals of Mexico City and Lima, the mining cities of Zacatecas and Potosí, (the latter by 1610 having a population in some estimates of 160,000, making it by far the largest city in the Americas), and in the 300 or more towns founded before 1600. The ideal for conquistadors and their progeny was to live in urban ease, drawing their income from their Indian *encomiendas*, and later from profits of mines and haciendas. Living in the countryside was no rural idyll but an exile from the centres of power and influence. In early Spanish American literature and art there is little of the pastoral ideal (nor is there in Spain itself) in contrast to the other countries of Western Europe.

Cities were a carapace providing protection and a sense of community in vast, inhospitable wildernesses peopled by wild men—"barbarians" beyond the pale of civilization (Pagden 1982). There was nothing in the rest of the Americas comparable to the "Spanish Royal Ordinance for the Laying Out of Towns" in 1573, which codified practices applied since the 1520s (Hanke 1967). The city was the visible symbol of civilization and empire, obeying the prescriptions of Renaissance town planners. Spanish American towns were in appearance abstractions constructed on the grid-iron pattern, the rational geometry of empire, a revival of Graeco-Roman practice and owing something in Mexico perhaps to Aztec example, but little to European medieval precedents. There was a sense, though, in which the importance of the city reflected Reconquista experience, where towns were founded for protective purposes, to replace isolated hamlets. Towns were also the pragmatic solution to the problem of rural dispersion in a geographical wilderness.

There was an Indian dimension to this emphasis on urban life (Gibson 1964). By a policy of congregation—concentrating Indians in urban settlements—initiated by the Crown in the latter half of the sixteenth century, social and fiscal control, and also proselitization, could be more effectively achieved, as well as shielding Indians from the unbridled

exploitation of *encomenderos*. However, the ideal of a separate *República de Indios* began to break down as mining towns developed their Indian suburbs. It was then that missionary settlements took root, especially in the Jesuit reductions in Paraguay (Mörner 1965). New England, too, had its praying towns, centres of Puritan evangelization of Indians, but these were miniscule in size—rarely exceeding 200 inhabitants

Towns in North America and in Brazil paled in comparison and lacked an architecture of spiritual and bureaucratic domination, symbolized in the Plaza Mayor with its Ayuntamiento and Church. In Brazil the loose nature of urban settlement reflected the dominance of the plantation house with its slave quarters until the growth of mining towns after the discovery of gold and diamonds in the eighteenth century. In French Canada, the population was too thin to encourage much urban settlement, except in terms of trading or missionary posts, to which both Montreal and Quebec owe their origins (Eccles 1969).

The Spiritual Conquest

The church was to become a major arm of empire, its critic, its conscience, as well as its legitimator (Ricard 1966; Phelan 1970). This is perhaps where the link with the Reconquista is most apparent. The Castilian town relied heavily on the military orders in its campaign against the Moors. The peninsular version of the *encomienda*, consisting of grants to the nobility, provides a model during the conquest of the Canary Islands in the fifteenth century and then for the Indies. The convent-fortresses of the orders of Calatrava, Alcántara and Santiago were the visible embodiments of the church militant. It is symbolic, however, that the first governor sent out to Hispaniola to repair the ravages caused by Columbus's weakness of control, Fray Ovando, had been responsible for reforming the Order of Alcántara. The values of a military and clerical aristocracy which had underpinned the success of the Reconquista should, in theory, have underpinned that of the Conquista. If the military orders represented the strain of the Reconquista with which conquistadors could readily identify, the missionary orders were another matter. Cortés, atypical as usual, requested Franciscans to be sent out to undertake the work of evangelization.

In the case of the English, although there was mention of evangelizing the Indians, there was no institutional basis for doing so. There was nothing comparable to the missionary orders and, although some priests took the task of evangelization seriously, they were inhibited by being tied to a parish and a congregation. A minister without a congregation was no minister.

“By their principles,” commented an Anglican visitor, “no nation has been, or ever can be converted” (Axtell 1981:255).

In contrast, in Spanish America the sharp distinction between seculars and regulars meant that there were groups of celibate priests who could become full-time missionaries. The role of the church and of the missionaries was highly ambivalent. In the early years of the Conquest they were often legitimators, as in the *Requerimiento*, and the role of Fr. Valverde in Peru is notorious. It is noticeable how, in Poma de Ayala's drawings, little distinction is made between the cruelty of settlers and of priests (Poma de Ayala 1989). However, as criticisms of the conquistadors' depredations mounted, resulting in the extreme case of the Contreras brothers in Central America killing a bishop, the Church became an ally in the Crown's attempts to curb settler power.

Franciscans and Dominicans had been first in the missionary field but the Jesuits, arriving late in the 1540s, finding little role in the heartlands, embraced the more difficult task of evangelizing on the exposed frontiers. Their importance in pacifying and expanding the frontiers of settlement cannot be exaggerated. Gold and silver might draw Spaniards into the interior but, once the finds were exhausted, the work of trailblazing was undertaken by the missionaries who, in doing so, became agents of empire. The Jesuit reductions were to play an important role in ensuring that Paraguay remained Spanish, although their conflict with the settlers in defending Indians against the depredations of the colonists was eventually to lead to the expulsion of the Order from Latin America in 1767 (Mörner 1965).

In English America Protestant pastors were prevented from living among Indians because of their parish and family commitments. Indians, therefore, had to be attracted to the settlements. The praying towns of New England were one solution—the Protestant equivalent of the Jesuit Reduction (Vaughan 1965). At first, the English tried to evangelize adults but with so little success that they switched to educating boys. In this way they could be “reduced to civility” and by being separated from pernicious family influences, could be inculcated into the faith. This was not a great success either, and few graduated from Dartmouth College, although it had originally been founded to educate Indians.

In common with the English, the Jesuits in Spanish, Portuguese and French America had to deal with numerous tribes, and to face the issue of having to master many languages. Nahuatl and Quechua had become the lingua franca of the Aztec and Inca empires, which facilitated communication during the Conquest, but the multiplicity of languages elsewhere posed complex problems, not least of which were early misunderstandings through mistranslations by the few available interpreters. Living among

the Indians the Jesuits, with their rigorous academic linguistic training, became adept at learning native languages. English priests, unlike traders and trappers in French Canada, were precluded from access to Indian women who, in the expressive phrase, were "sleeping dictionaries".

In contrast to Catholic missionaries, dour Protestant pastors were hampered by their reluctance to appeal to the senses. The appeal of Catholic missionaries has been described thus:

As he learned to adjust his way to those of the Indians, the priest also began to promulgate his Christian message by appealing to all their senses. In native hands he placed attractive silver and brass medals, rings, crucifixes and rosaries—not unlike their own wampum belts, medicine sticks, and condolence canes—as mnemonic devices to recall his oral message. To their noses he introduced the mysterious fragrances of incense. To their lips he lifted holy wafers. To their eyes he offered huge wooden crosses, candlelit altars rich with silk and silver, long, brocaded chasubles, and pictorial images of the major scenes in the drama of Christianity. And into their ears he poured sonorous hymns and chants, tinkling bells and an endless stream of Indian words—haltingly, even laughably, pronounced at first, but soon fluent and cadenced in native measures. Here his long training in logic, rhetoric and disputation stood him in good stead, once he grasped the novel motivations, interests, and fears of this listeners. Believing that "in order to convert these peoples, one must begin by touching their hearts, before he can convince their minds, "the priest sought to manage their dispositions by an adroit use of flattery, bribery, ridicule, insult "mildness and force, threats and prayers, labors and tears". (Axtell 1985:278).

A major obstacle in the English colonies was the Protestant assumption that Indians had no religion, but few Europeans bothered to penetrate their complex but rational cosmologies, unlike Spanish friars who studied Indian religion the better to convert them. Shot through with ethnocentric superiority, the Indian frontier in English-North America was one of exclusion, not inclusion.

How deep was the apparent greater success of the Spanish in comparison with the English experience? How genuine were their mass conversions? Early Spanish missionaries were clearly delighted by Indians' religiosity and, once the native priests had been discredited by defeat, the vacuum could be easily filled. The "spiritual conquest" was symbolized by an ecclesiastical architecture of spiritual domination. There is nothing comparable in the English (or French) experience to the involvement of Indian labourers (and later decorators of the Spanish American baroque) in the massive church-building programme of the early years of the Conquest, particularly in Mexico (Kubler 1972). This was one area of activity where Indians could become incorporated into the new society.

For conquistadors, missionary activity was an embarrassing nuisance.

The New Laws of 1542 which, had they been fully implemented, would have abolished all forms of personal service, making *encomienda* Indians direct vassals of the Crown, were a direct threat to their interests. Without Christianization the conquistadors would have been free to carry on their slaving expeditions, for savages who refused to be converted could be enslaved. Native customs and practices such as human sacrifice, cannibalism, polygamy, aberrant sexual habits, drugtaking, heightened the Spaniards' sense of moral superiority underpinning the imperialism of righteousness and justifying enslavement. There was however, a double standard throughout the Americas which has gone largely unrecorded. Even in moralistic New England the Puritan community of the Plymouth colony was not exempt from sexual misbehaviour and in 1642 was swept by a series of scandals, with a teenage servant being executed for unnatural relations with "a mare, a cow, two goats, five sheep, two calves and a turkey"—"as was the practice", he said, "in old England" (Axtell 1985:259 n.146).

The Lure of Gold and the Shift to Silver

The lure of gold which would "cure the disease of the heart" in Cortés' oft-quoted phrase, blotted out all other motives for going to the New World. As he lay dying, Hernando de Córdoba could make sense of his life by writing to Governor Velasquez in Cuba that Yucatan had gold, although those who were to settle there later did so in the knowledge that there was in fact no gold there. Gold obliterated the memory of suffering, transmuting disaster into triumph. "Gold", wrote Columbus, "is the most precious of all commodities: gold constitutes treasure, and he who possesses it has all he needs in this world, and also the means of expelling the souls of the dead from Paradise" (Pastor 1992:51). Gold would not merely satisfy the greed of men but would bring about the triumph of Christianity. It would be the key to freedom and was mystically spiritualized in Columbus's belief that by it Jerusalem would be rebuilt (Flint 1992; Fernández Armesto 1991).

The reasons for the obsession with gold were rooted in the scarcity of precious metals in Europe, resulting from a deficit in trade with the East, and in Spain from the high cost of the Reconquista War, involvement in Italian campaigns and in the new European-wide commitments of the Spanish Crown.

The constant references in Cortés' letter to the possibility of finding gold were aimed at eliciting Crown support and to legitimate conquest, but for the ordinary conquistador, gold had a talismanic quality: its

acquisition brought immediate wealth, broke down social barriers, increased prestige, turning the adventurous and impoverished *hidalgo* into a gentleman of means. For people with a short life expectancy, the possession of gold accelerated social mobility, and it was gold that sustained the Hapsburgs in their conflict with the Bourbons and with the Ottoman Empire. An exaggerated importance placed on gold undercut the value of all else in the Americas. Even precious stones were undervalued. The spices for which the initial voyages were undertaken gradually disappeared from view as the obsession for gold underlay the plunder mentality of the Caribbean period. Gold was to exert a pernicious and devastating influence on the course of the Conquest, leading to the depredations of the early decades, and to fruitless quests for *El Dorado* which diverted attention from other potential sources of wealth. Gold soon ran out and was replaced by the exploitation of silver from the 1540s onwards. Silver mining, with its technological demands, marks a qualitative change from the gold-plundering period and its attendant slaving expeditions which dominated the conquistador mentality. The shift to silver symbolically marks the end of the conquistador phase: now a premium was placed on mining skills, technology and rational organization. Gold was the touchstone of the Conquest years: silver of the settlement years.

The Problem of Control

A sharp distinction must be made between the often brutal control exercised by *caudillos* in the early Conquista years and control by complex checks and balances which accompanied the bureaucratization of the settlement period from the 1550s onwards and which partly explains the ineffectualness of revolts against royal power, as in the case of that of Martin Cortés in Mexico City in 1566 (Benítez 1962). More serious was the threat to public order posed by the large mestizo population, many of whom became vagabonds, often preying on Indian communities.

The almost complete absence of miscegenation in English America precluded that sort of instability. The problem, at least in Virginia, lay in an inability of the proprietors of the colony to choose suitable colonists. It proved very difficult to attract "husbandmen truly bred" to Virginia, and many of the colonists there were convicted felons, unemployed youth from London and vagrants. The workforce in Virginia was described as being full of "mutinie and treasonable impediments". Considerable numbers seem to have escaped into Indian society, although there was official reluctance to admit that Indian society was preferable to that of the colony.

“To live idle among the savages” was the common explanation, since most work was done by women while the men fought and hunted. It was quite usual for Indian societies to welcome newcomers as a means of replenishing losses in intertribal conflicts. The phenomenon of the “white Indian” is one which has not attracted the attention it deserves, but it is striking that those who had escaped to Indian society much preferred it to that of the colonies, and when repatriated found it very difficult to settle down. Very few nobles could be tempted to risk the rigours of frontier life—“our English gallant will neither wett his foote nor want his fare”. Lacking nobles, the promotors of the Virginia company had to make do with landless younger sons of the minor gentry or ex-officers, replicating the pattern of the Irish colonization.

The situation in New England was very different, as the majority of colonists were inspired by the Puritan vision of building a “City on a Hill”. Although many were drawn from the artisan and husbandmen class, many of the pastors were of gentry stock, but sharing very few of the attitudes of their Spanish counterparts. Whereas control in Virginia in its inception was modelled on that of a seigniorial society (legitimated by the Anglican Church) in New England the constraints were those of a narrow puritan morality, with emphasis on the work ethic and the belief that virtue lay in agricultural toil and in taming the wilderness. Hence the scorn for Indians whose hunting and gathering was not regarded as work—hunting and shooting were pastimes for the gentry.

Bureaucratization

The Spanish Empire, in the process of consolidation from the 1550s onwards, became one of the most bureaucratic empires that the world has ever seen, now frozen historically in the mountains of records in Spanish and Spanish American archives which have no rivals elsewhere (Elliott 1984b). The tight control exercised by the Spanish Crown was, of course, deliberate. Once Charles V became Charles I of Spain, the peninsula became irrevocably drawn into European power politics for which the flow of American silver was crucial to sustain Spanish power. At the same time, Spain had to bear the brunt of opposition to the Turks and to lead the Counter-Reformation response to Protestantism. Laxity among its American subjects could not be tolerated: to control their labour supply was to deprive them of independent action. Thus to the humanitarian thrust of the missionaries—albeit with conversion as their aim—was added Realpolitik. It is still remarkable that the aim of the Spanish Crown could be achieved without the use of that massive force which was

necessary to suppress internal dissent in Spain itself, as in the case of the Comuneros in 1521 and the Revolt of the Catalans in the seventeenth century. The centralization which the Crown was able to impose in the Indies was evidence that the Age of the Conquistadors had passed but not, as many know to their cost today, their baleful legacy.

The Comparison with Brazil

Although there are superficial similarities with the colonization and settlement of Brazil the differences are, in fact, very deep (Morse 1965; Hemming 1978a; Freyre 1946). As with the coastal settlement of English North America until the crossing of the Appalachians in the eighteenth century, and as with the riverine settlements of French Canada along the St. Lawrence, so the early settlement of Brazil was confined to the coastal sugar-growing region of the North-East. The absence of immediately identifiable sources of mineral wealth in the interior, the density of forests inhabited by Indians whose early friendship and eagerness to barter turned to hostility once the Portuguese tried to force them to labour on the plantations, deterred inland expansion. In any case, the development of a sugar export industry, with African slaves channelled through Portugal's African entrepôts, oriented the early colony to Europe and slotted it into a network of commercial relationships quite distinct from that of Spanish America. Sugar had to be marketed and sold in a way that gold and silver did not, so the Portuguese became dependent on merchants and financiers—often of Jewish extraction—which internationalized Brazilian trade in a manner quite distinct from the inner-directed exclusiveness of Spanish commerce.

The only forays into the interior were in search of pasture to provide the cattle needed to power the sugar mills, to feed slaves and to supply leather accoutrements. This involved the destruction of forest cover and the establishment of cattle ranches (Silver 1990). Because of the quick exhaustion of lateritic soils through exposure to sun and rain, the cattle frontier pushed further and further inland, and as in the Spanish American case, attracted misfits from the settled coastal region, runaway slaves and mixed bloods. It also involved incessant warfare with Indian tribes whose forest cover and hunting grounds were constantly being destroyed. Cattle ranching developed in a symbiotic relationship with sugar plantations in much the same way as did ranches to mines in Mexico (Hennessy 1978).

There was no corpus of regulations defining Indian/Portuguese relations with its attendant bureaucracy as in Spanish America. The absence of an equivalent to assertive conquistadors (with their potential threat of

establishing fiefdoms dependent on an enslaved Indian population and independent of the Crown) made the development of a countervailing bureaucracy in Brazil unnecessary—at least until the middle of the eighteenth century.

The Portuguese did not attach the same importance to the city as an administrative centre and as the visible embodiment of imperium, with its gridiron ground plan imposing some sense of order and uniformity on the wilderness. As Gilberto Freyre (1946) has suggested, the Casa Grande fulfils a similar function to that of the Spanish bureaucratic city but without all the checks and balances and the bureaucratic intricacies of the Spanish “paper empire”. The looser control from Portugal gave to Brazilian political and social relations an elasticity which was lacking in Spanish America.

It must not be forgotten either that the collapse of the Portuguese crusading mission in the disastrous battle of Alcazarquivir of 1578 in Morocco, in which King Sebastian was killed, enabled Philip II to lay claim to the Portuguese throne and to merge together the Spanish and Portuguese empires for a 60-year period. The consequences for Brazil were disastrous in that the Dutch, involved in their War of Independence against Spain, could now direct their attention to Portugal’s colonies and from 1624 occupied Brazil until 1654. As Portugal was in no position to defend her colony its protection was left to locally-recruited Brazilian levies—which included all sections of the population, sometimes even officered by blacks or Indians, so instilling an early consciousness of *brasilidade*.

Dutch control of the sugar region, which involved the cutting of the slave supply from Portuguese Africa, shifted the centre of gravity for labour to the inland region round São Paulo. Here, from its foundation (partly by Jesuits) in 1554, a distinctive society largely of mixed Portuguese-Indian ancestry emerged. In contrast to the rooted population of the coast and of the Casa Grande, this was a mobile society which invites comparison with the early conquistadors, with whom they shared a restless adventurousness, the urge to discover precious metals, and a similar policy of slave-raiding *entradas* to provide labour for the depleted sugar plantations. Euclides da Cunha considered that these *entradas* constituted the only original heroic tradition in Brazilian history, because of the way in which the paulistas, organizing themselves into *bandeiras*, (hence *bandeirantes*), ranged throughout the Brazilian highlands and Amazonia and in doing so gave Portugal a pre-emptive claim to the vast interior. Spaniards, such as Francisco de Orellana, had followed down the course of the Amazon but had established no settlements, whereas during the 3-year *bandeira* of Pedro Teixeira a variety of settlements had been established.

Although bandeirantes shared some of the same traits as conquistadors in their zestful search for gold, and in their slave-raiding forays and in their sharing out of booty, there are significant differences. The bandeirantes were mixed bloods: having to negotiate dense forests, they moved on foot, not on horses, returning to São Paulo to market their catch of slaves. The larger bandeiras were towns on the march, comprising families and retainers, making it difficult to classify them in purely military terms. Unlike conquistadors they identified with the land in terms of dress and weapons, often using bows and arrows in preference to firearms, and speaking Tupi rather than Portuguese.

Brazilians (and more especially paulistas) have mythologized the bandeirantes as nationalist heroes in a way that Spanish Americans have not done with the conquistadors. Besides their pathfinding role of geographical discovery, and importance as catchers of African maroons, and as the final discoverers of gold in Ouro Preto, the bandeirantes were largely responsible for blocking the Jesuit drive to the sea. In their conflict with the Jesuits, who defended their reductions against the bandeirantes' slaving forays, they acted as the sentinels of Portuguese sovereignty over the continent's disputed heartland. It is not surprising that there should be a museum of the bandeirantes in São Paulo recording their achievements. It is unlikely however, that a museum of the conquistadors will ever be established, even by the triumphalists of 1992. If anyone should be rash enough to attempt to do so, they had better look to their defences.

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