Borders: Spaces of sociability in Santa Marta in the mid-eighteenth century in Colombia

Fronteras: Espacios de sociabilidad en la Santa Marta de mediados del XVIII en Colombia

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Abstract
When a state, in this case a monarchical state, establishes fixed borders in territories without a stable political domain, the result is completely different than that of organizing such a territory. The creation of mixed societies in the north of present-day Colombia is a process whose roots are found in the implementation of the Bourbon Reforms in the mid-eighteenth century by Crown Agents. This article identifies and discusses the processes that led to the emergence of an autonomous society in this border area.

Keywords: border, sociability, *mestizaje*, cultural transformation, negotiation.

Resumen
El proceso de establecimiento de fronteras fijas en territorios sin dominio político estable por parte de un Estado, en este caso el Estado Monárquico, antes que ordenar el territorio produce un fenómeno totalmente distinto. La creación de sociedades mestizas, en el norte de lo que hoy es Colombia, es un proceso que encuentra sus raíces en la implementación de las Reformas Borbónicas a mediados del XVIII por parte de los agentes de la Corona. Este artículo pretende reconocer y comprender los procesos que dieron paso al surgimiento de una sociedad autónoma en esta área de frontera.

Palabras clave: frontera, sociabilidad, mestizaje, transformación cultural, negociación.

(Original article language: Spanish)

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to determine how social dynamics are affected by a territory's social configuration. To this end, it examines the establishment of borders through the foundation of villages and reduction campaigns. This study focuses on the province of Santa Marta in present-day northern Colombia during the second half of the eighteenth century. This period is particularly relevant because during this time, the Spanish Crown began to reorganize this territory under the guidance of the Bourbon Reforms.

Such reorganization occurred throughout the continent during this period. Lia Quarleri states, "in the last decades of the eighteenth century, the Hispanic-American territory experienced a series of intense population movements and demographic transformations resulting from direct policies, supported by certain ideological frameworks, as well as socioeconomic transformations" (Quarleri, 2012, para. 1).

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This region was inhabited by societies that, since their first contact with Europeans, had been subjected to processes of Westernization by the Spanish empire. Two broad categories of societies resulted: those comprising native peoples called "peaceful aborigines" who submitted and adapted to the new social system, transforming their culture (Gutiérrez, 2010; Gruzinski, 2004), and tribes who resisted domination. These latter groups were called "unconquered" or "savage aborigines," and they opposed the imposition of the colonial system, becoming targets of military action by the representatives of the Crown (Zuluaga, 2010).

Over time, communities of free individuals of all ethnicities—*mestizos* (half European and half Amerindian), *mulatos* (half European and half African), *zambos* (half Amerindian and half African), and even Spanish fugitives—settled in this territory and were assimilated to the regional dynamics. Incidentally, these dynamics facilitated the implementation of the Bourbon reforms and the emergence of a new society. This society was a marginal society that had adapted to the area's natural conditions, resulting in a process of social miscegenation that configured a sprawling yet deeply rooted population.

The territory discussed in this paper lay beyond the Spanish borders to the north of the Viceroyalty of New Granada in the interfluvial forest that extends between the Cesar River to the east and the Magdalena River to the west. The Momposina Depression lies to its south, and the Ciénaga Grande and Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta lie to the north (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1946). This jungle territory was inhabited by Precolumbian peoples subjected to Crown-imposed settlement processes, tangible and intangible cultural exchanges and attempts to establish fixed borders and delineate a noticeable and effective domain. This "border area", as it is called by Viviana García, refers to the territory adjacent to the space in which all of the relations of sociability are conceived (García, 2015). These borders, rather than being ruled, became diffuse and imprecise places of continuous setbacks and progress; they became spaces for trading and socializing among all of the groups coexisting in the territory.

The Crown's settlement project consisted in establishing towns along the region's rivers, especially in the margins of the Magdalena river, which was the most important commercial fluvial artery of the viceroyalty. The objective was to define, control, and protect cargo from attacks perpetrated by the unconquered population attempting to sabotage the interests of the Crown (Ybot, 1952). Fiscal and economic control measures were also being applied to all of the informal trade that had developed in the Momposina Depression. Moreover, the intention was to indoctrinate, reduce, and evangelize the dispersed individuals who inhabited the rainforest and to conscript them for mining and agricultural activities. However, Eugenia Néspolo states that rather than achieving greater social control, this border dynamic led to the configuration of a mestizo society that involved all the inhabitants of these lands (Néspolo, 2006; Quarleri, 2012).

Jorge Conde, referring to the Cartagena province, explains (1999):

> This model of spatial organization was spontaneous and dispersed, and emerged beyond the control of the colonial city Cartagena de Indias. Simultaneously, the displacement of the mestizo population toward these empty spaces pointed to the existence of agricultural borders that could sustain new settlements known as sites (pp. 34-35).

This phenomenon was replicated throughout the Caribbean region (Polo, 2007). For the Crown and the Church, these sites became a constant threat to social stability because they enabled the emergence of the mestizo culture.

These lands were attractive to the Crown and to high-ranking creoles because they had the ideal conditions for cultivation and cattle rearing (Rosa, 1975). However, both the jungle and the major cities, including Mompox, which was a border site of colonial power, were inhabited by people of *all types* (Santa Gertrudis, 1970).

Mompox, in particular, was optimally located for formal and informal trade because it was an obligatory route for those bringing wood, resins, gold, silver and fur from the southern part of the viceroyalty to the Caribbean ports for export or trade. Additionally, it was a hub for goods entering the region legally through the currently authorized ports—Santa Marta, Cartagena, Portobelo—and for English and Dutch smuggling activities south of Riohacha (Trejos and Luquetta, 2014). Salzedo del Villar reports that (1987) Mompox became a trade center and the commercial core of the province (Herrera, 2002), specifying that "this trade so was substantial and active that one would not be exaggerating when rating it as the second commercial plaza of the Colony" (p. 75). Similarly, Fals Borda (1979) stated that "Mompox stood out then as the natural center of import smuggling" (87A). All of the merchandise from Honda, Ocaña, the mines in southern Cartagena province and northern Antioquia had to pass through this village (Humboldt, 1980). Therefore, conquering this region meant acquiring large areas of land and wealth for the *marquesados* (Daza, 2009).

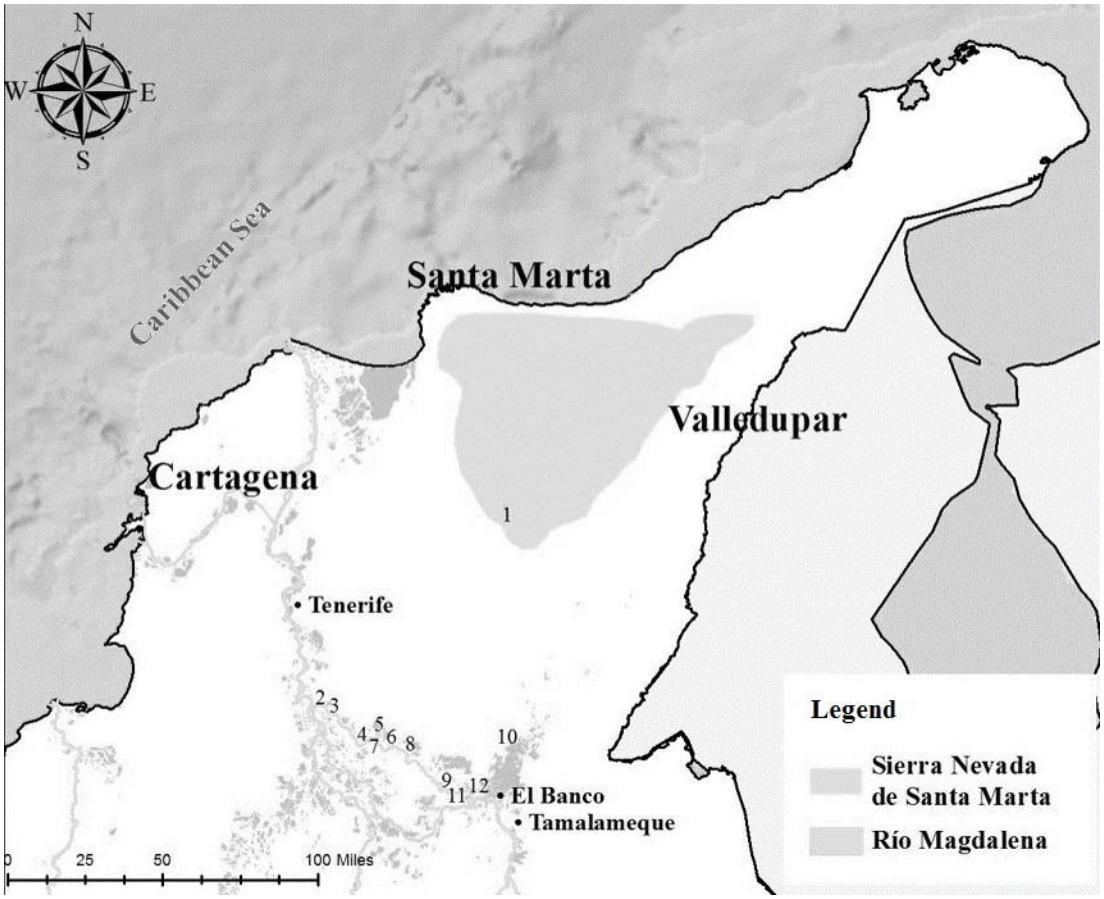
Settlements in the eighteenth century

Initially, the Crown appointed Don José Fernando de Mier y Guerra, a Spanish nobleman and nephew of the first Marquis of Santa Coa, to implement the reforms. Mier y Guerra settled in Mompox and was given the title of *maestre de campo* (grand master) over the whole province. He was granted judiciary power by Viceroy Eslava, who also benefited from the enterprise —Mier y Guerra bore the cost of the campaigns and initiatives—. Furthermore, the State allowed him to administer justice to legitimize the system and bring the territory to order, allowing him to use every resource necessary to gain control of the region. Smuggling constituted a large part of the area's commercial activity,[1] from which Mier y Guerra himself and other representatives of the Crown profited. "This symbiosis was so thorough that nobody in that society could remain uninvolved in the chain of complicity that reached, as it currently does, the highest ranks in the administration" (Fals, 1979, p. 87A).

Part of Mier y Guerra's work involved the foundation of 12 towns, most of which were located in the right margin of the Magdalena. These towns were established in an initial stage that lasted four years (see Figure 1). During this time, the peacemaker sought to establish the social order required by the Crown. Nevertheless, this article asserts that, rather than controlling the population, which was the objective of the campaigns and of initiatives, Mier y Guerra incited individuals to retreat toward the mountains or the forests to start a new, autonomous social and cultural order completely beyond the surveillance and control of the Crown and the Church (see Figure 2).

[1] For further reading, see Polo y Solano (2011); Polo (2005); Grahn (1985); Pedraja (1978) and García (2011).

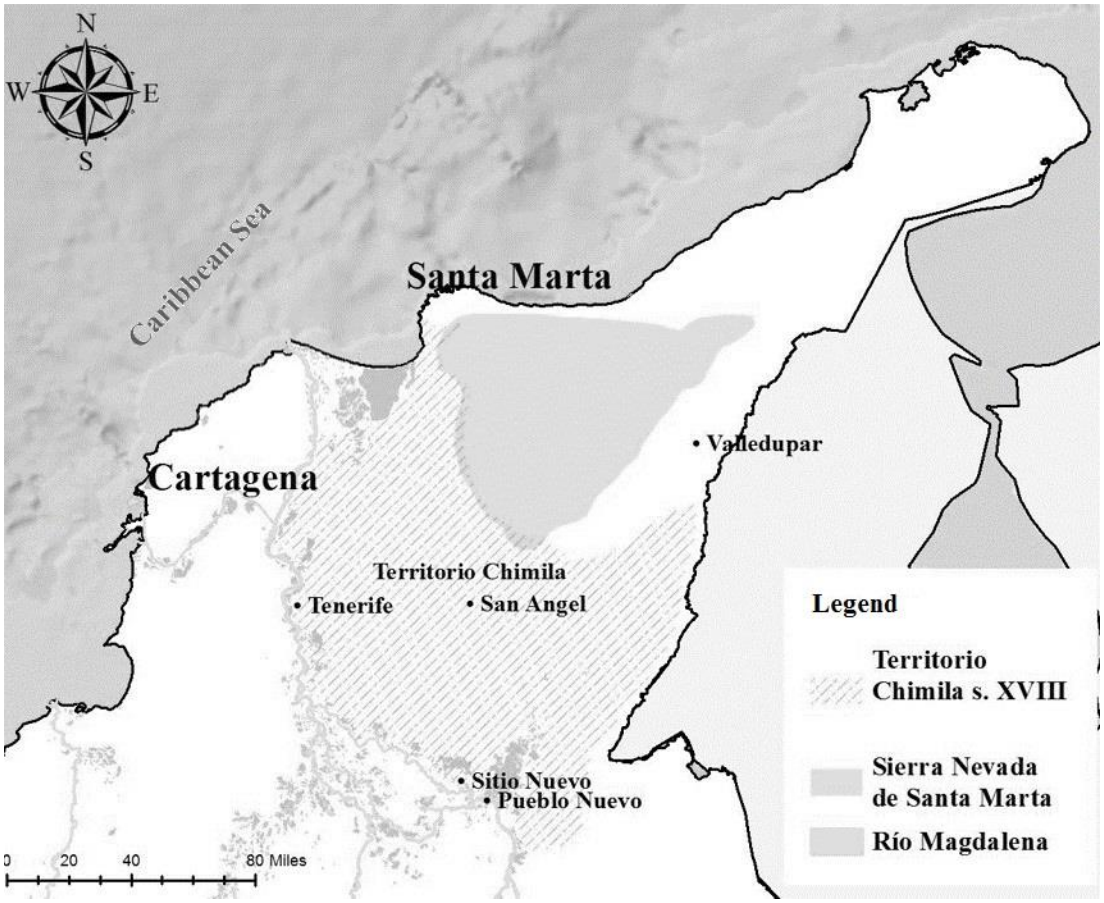
Figure 1. Towns founded by José Fernando de Mier y Guerra (1749 - 1753)



1. San Sebastián de Rábago	7. Santa Cruz de Pizarro
2. Santa Ana de Pinto	8. San Sebastián de Menchiquejo
3. Nuestra Señora de Barrancas	9. Carvajal
4. Santa Ana de Buenavista	10. Chimichaque
5. San Fernando del Cascajal	11. Candelaria
6. San Zenón de Navarro	12. Tamalamequito

Source: Author.

Figure 2. 1764 Expedition led by Mier y Guerra in the company of Antonio Alcoy

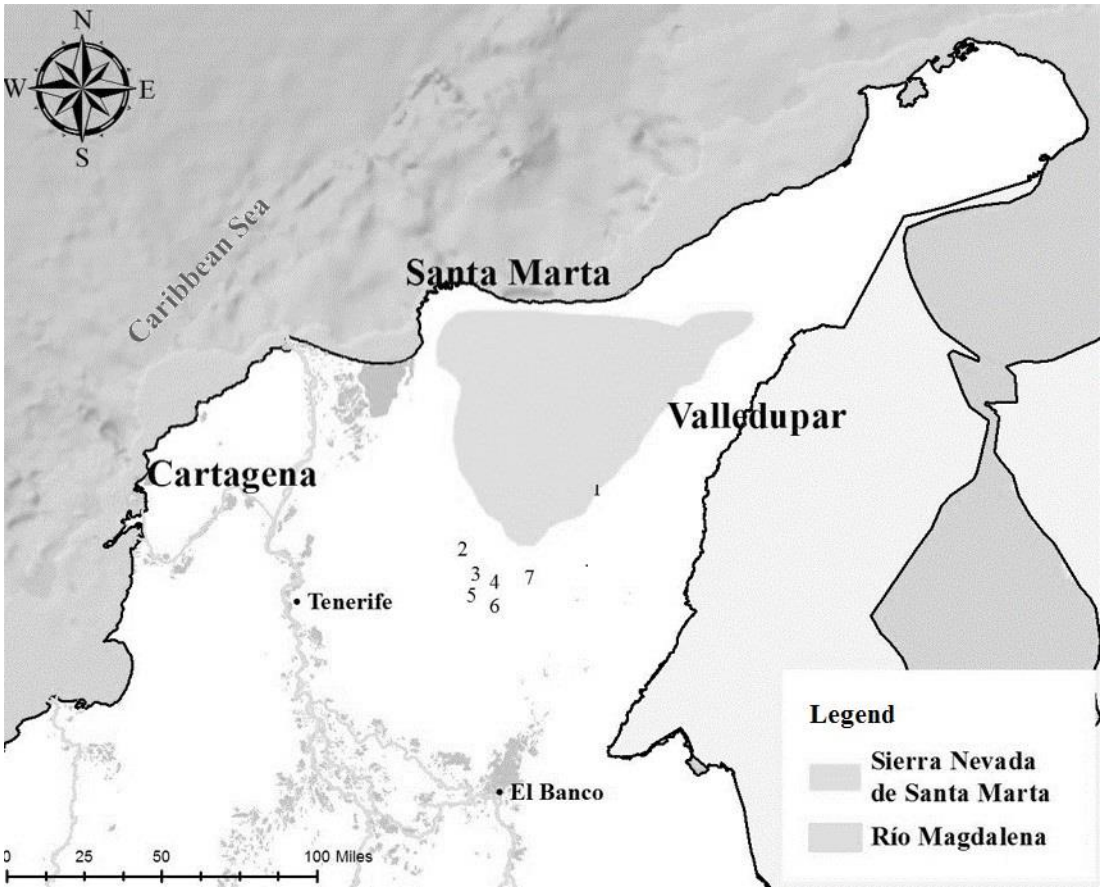


Source: Author.

The objective was to establish a model of territorial administration based on the appropriation of the territory that the natives freely traversed and profited from according to natural law. The Crown's intention was to satisfy its desire to extend its domains beyond the small spaces it had accumulated while expanding its borders (Luquetta and Vidal, 2014).

After the death of Mier y Guerra in 1780, the former captain of conquest Agustin de la Sierra acquired the title of *Maestre de campo*. During this period, a new wave of towns was founded (Gonzalez, 1978): Garupal (Capuchin missionaries); San Miguel de Punta Gorda (Capuchin missionaries); Santa Catalina; San Antonio (Capuchin missionaries); Ariguaní; Concepción de Venero; and San José de las Pavas (Capuchin missionaries) (see Figure 3). Agustin de la Sierra was appointed after having served as captain of the conquest for Mier y Guerre, the former *Maestre de campo*, in Valledupar. He was a military man who had acquired vast experience through his involvement in the containment of the Chimila people.

Figure 3. Towns founded by Agustín de la Sierra (1776)



1. Garupal	5. Ariguaní
2. San Miguel de Punta Gorda	6. Concepción de Venero
3. Santa Catalina	7. San Jose de las Pavas
4. San Antonio	

Source: Author.

As villagers began taking possession of the marginal areas, the religious also began to evangelize. Thus, a new agent was introduced into the emerging social landscape. The colonists represented a culture, and missionaries and other Church representatives added other cultural dimensions. This situation created new forms of territoriality because by assimilating or defying evangelization, the inhabitants of the jungle felt the influence of this exchange of tangible and intangible cultural elements. Establishing towns not only involved naming spaces but also introduced agricultural practices, livestock, tools, and even a new perception of time.

The natives and mestizos that settled in the villages founded by the colonizers were given tools to fell trees and cultivate the forest and animals for breeding. Those who had not been conquered continued their cultural practices (Sæther, 2005). Though they went to the towns to receive benefits, they returned to the jungle to continue their traditional ways of life:

> To gather families, Lord Narváez gave two cows, twelve goats, eleven hens and a rooster, a machete and an axe to every native. Moreover, the lord had to find ways to prevent natives from going back to the jungle, since it was recorded that under the pretext of searching for supplies such as bread, wine and wax, they came to town, and then apologized and left without fulfilling their obligations, expressing that they suffered from certain diseases, whether true or alleged, and abandoned the parishioners. (Archivo General de la Nación Colombia [AGN], 1797-1798).

Miscegenation in border areas

In the jungle, free individuals coexisted with others living in the territory. Thus, alliances were created to resist the incursion of the Spaniards and to attack the convoys traveling overland and by river. Many of the inhabitants of the interfluvial valleys found shelter in the large areas of rainforest outside the domain of the Catholic monarchs.

However, after the implementation of the reforms, the campaigns became increasingly intense and more difficult to avoid, as did the process of cultural transformation. In response, stronger alliances were constituted in the interior of the jungle to create a social force that could obstruct the passage and arrival of Iberian culture. Those who resisted were subjected to repetitive attacks intended to pacify or reduce them, as history shows. Like those who submitted, those groups that sought to safeguard their territory, their ritual practices, their religion and their culture experienced miscegenation phenomena generated by the alliances formed to defend the territory. These alliances included the Chimilas' alliance with the Arauacos, the Taironas, and the Goajiros (Isaacs, 1951), and over time, an alliance between the entire free population of all ethnicities and the mestizos (Sæther, 2005).

This miscegenation, initially promoted by the alliances, increased in the forests where natives, mestizos and, possibly, Spanish fugitives coexisted.[2] Several testimonies from this time describe the social development that occurred in the jungle throughout the Province on an atomic scale:

> There were seventy Chimilas, who had a mestizo as a Capitan, and when they saw that the Spaniards had escaped from them, they unleashed their anger with the black people living on a ranch. For this witness, this case proved that the Chimilas had spies in towns to warn them about their movements, evidencing that they were not alone in those barbaric lands. This individual also testified that since a mestizo was leading them, he feared that white fugitives and refugees would be among the natives as well (Julián, 1854, p. 162).

> … A group of approximately 30 Chimilas came to the translator to negotiate with me. After some confusion, which lead to insults, a civilized man told me that his name was Manuel José de la Sierra. This person, using inconsistent expressions, showed me that in that place, named Guallacanes, the Chimilas suffered great miseries and want, and that for this reason they requested help. They asked me to talk to the governor and assure him that they wanted to baptize their children, see his priest, and to work planting corn, cassava, yams, cotton and all kinds of fruit, to stay and to make good use of the tools such as axes and machetes that

[2] We rely on Julio Caro Baroja's concept of coexistence, which considers the dynamism created when diverse cultures collide. This concept is discussed in his 1992 book, *Las falsificaciones de la Historia (en relación con la de España [The falsifications of history (in relation to that of Spain)]*.

> they would receive. They also expressed their desire to dwell on the banks of the river, where they would settle anywhere the governor wished as long as they would get an answer within two months. Additionally, they stated that they were nearly fifty families, but offered to bring many more with them if they received help (AGN, 1803).

These testimonies show that despite the underlying complexity of the nuclear organization of these jungle inhabitants, they successfully used strategies of political negotiation and the consolidation of power. They offered the Crown what they knew it needed: population, families for its towns, labor and assimilation to the dogmas of the Catholic faith. However, they demanded coastal territories in exchange.

Thus, the establishment of borders was clearly a social process that, instead of imposing control, enabled the blossoming of this marginal society beyond the margins of colonial domination (Sæther, 2005). The militia strategy used by Mier y Guerra to enter the Chimila territory supports this conclusion. A description of the expedition led by Jose Joaquin de Zuñiga in 1768 (Castro, 2011) specifies that there were fourteen Spaniards and mestizos among the militiamen and twenty-eight natives from Bonda, Masinga and Mamatoc (AGN, 1768). Néspolo argues that the activities conducted by the mestizo militiamen not only served the Crown but also provided them the opportunity to develop neighborly relations (Mier, 1987).

Determined to persist in their attempt to expand their borders and control these lands, the colonists were forced to negotiate with the jungle population. The Spaniards offered, first, the possibility of settling down in a village with a priest, a mayor, and a police force. They also promised access to tools and animals and allowed them join to the rural and urban militias. This would give the jungle population the status of neighbor, which allowed them social and political benefits. The natives and mestizos, however, gained power to negotiate. The latter offered the Spaniards access to the territory in exchange for assimilation to the colonial system, labor, more families to settle in the villages, and the capture of families that were threatening the people and the Spanish towns.

> I found the town Guayacanes entirely destroyed and there were six natives in the bushes who looked for the ones that were missing and gathered over forty men, without counting women, children and aggregates, and cleaned up the plan of the town. They offered to stay, and with their freedom signed, fifteen of them followed the perpetrators of the damage in Río Grande, ensuring that they would bring them back in order to receive their recognition (AGN, 1801-1802).

Because of such threats, the Crown was left with no other option but to refrain from violent encounters with these communities and to begin negotiations. These negotiations unconsciously shaped a new social panorama and the cultural transformation of the entire territory.

The negotiations began a process of cultural exchange that resulted in a society that had so much strength, endurance and persistence that its dynamism continues to influence modern Colombians. It established the roots of Colombian Caribbean society. We are children of causality, and we have nothing to do with chance (Vidal and Luquetta, 2015, p. 45).

Territory and culture… a final discussion

The transformations imposed on the landscape involved native communities in a hybridization process with the mestizo population. Therefore, by the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century, the trace of some native communities, such as the Chimilas, became diffuse and dispersed, almost invisible. This phenomenon arose from these communities' need to survive. Members and families belonging to these groups subjected themselves to the Crown agents. Others opposed being stripped of their territory, but above all, they resisted the changes introduced by the settlers' appropriation of their spaces as they tried to prevent their culture from being altered by the impositions resulting not from the colonial system but from the miscegenation process.

Such processes offer insight into contemporary cultural phenomena. Though we know that today's society originated with the arrival of man to America approximately 12 thousand years ago, it was at this juncture of reforms and miscegenation that the social and cultural transformation of the Caribbean reached its climax. As Marcello Carmagnani (2004) states:

> It should be noted that these territories were experiencing a marked increase in production and population which configured a dynamic society with powerful local and regional elites, with well-defined social and political interests and with its own culture that included elements from the European and Iberian world. In other words, Latin America as we know it today was born during this historic stage (p. 81).

Pre-Hispanic peoples living in the province of Santa Marta had a culture and a way of life that was deeply influenced by their natural environment. The jungle offered them food, protection and everything they needed for subsistence. In this environment, they were able to organize their ways of life, appropriate territory, build places to live, structure their religious beliefs and obtain from nature what they needed to survive.

This lifestyle clashed radically with the Western system imposed by the conquest that, for three centuries, attempted to dominate them. In the mid-eighteenth century, this program of domination gained momentum. The Spanish drove these indigenous communities further into the interior of the jungle. Eventually, they began to meet and interact with other non-native communities through the Crown's attempts to establish more effective control of their lands and expand the colonial borders. Such negotiations and alliances strengthened the mestizo culture that had been developing since the natives' first contact with Europeans. Through such interactions, the social setting of the whole province was influenced by the demographic growth of the mestizo population.

The mestizo population strongly opposed this process, though it was not necessarily warlike or violent. The mestizos were able to withstand the invasion of the representatives of the Crown into their territory. However, they were gradually forced to decrease their resistance, and a new mestizo culture began to flourish. During the nineteenth century, they provided the labor necessary to exploit a territory rich in biodiversity and, therefore, in natural resources.

Unlike in the jungle, in the cities, where the presence of the Crown was palpable, *Mestizaje* (the process of miscegenation) was a project guided by social, economic and perhaps political dynamics (Lopez-Bejarano, 2008). In urban spaces, the Spaniards exerted strength and control. Nevertheless, beyond cities such as Santa Marta and

Cartagena in areas north of present-day Colombia, this monarchical power dissipated as it neared the jungle. In other words, power was concentrated in and generated by the commercial and port activities taking place in the cities.

This new society was configured in the jungle beyond the colonial borders, where the marginal communities lived. The Crown's campaign to expand the borders had an opposite effect from that which was intended. The Crown's plan to dominate this area, contrary to what Marta Herrera argues, was not effective nor did it have the expected outcomes in the interfluvial valleys of Santa Marta (Herrera, 2002). Neither the religious evangelizers nor the peacemakers had the ability or the strength to reorganize the jungle communities, which retreated and exponentially populated the interior of the province. Rather than achieving the goals of the Bourbon reforms, the pacification, reduction and evangelization campaigns implemented in Santa Marta during the mid-eighteenth century gave birth to a society that continues to express its autonomous social and cultural roots today.

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