

## Introduction

By an art of being in-between, he draws unexpected results from his situation.

MICHEL DE CERTEAU, *THE PRACTICE OF EVERYDAY LIFE* (1984)

A native rebellion in colonial Mexico put two Zapotec Indians on the road to sainthood. On 14 September 1700, in the district of Villa Alta, Oaxaca, leaders of the Zapotec pueblo of San Francisco Cajonos led a mob of angry villagers to the door of the nearby Dominican monastery. The leaders of the mob demanded that the friars hand over Jacinto de los Angeles and Juan Bautista, two of their fellow villagers, who had taken refuge there. If the friars refused, the village leaders threatened to kill everyone inside. Angeles and Bautista served as *fiscales* (assistants) to the pueblo's Dominican priest, Fray Gaspar de los Reyes. The night before, Angeles and Bautista had reported to Reyes that a large gathering of natives, including the pueblo's municipal officers, had congregated at the home of Joseph Flores, a community leader. There, according to Angeles and Bautista, the gathered villagers committed a grave offense against the Catholic Church and royal authority: they performed and participated in native rituals, which the Church considered "idolatry."

In the eyes of the villagers, Angeles and Bautista had betrayed their community by reporting to the priest. In the eyes of the priest,

Angeles and Bautista had fulfilled their role as his eyes and ears. For the friars under siege in the monastery, however, the *fiscales*' service to the Church was counterbalanced by the hundreds of angry villagers outside the monastery. Terrified for their own lives, the friars turned out their trusted assistants. The crowd took the two *fiscales* away, and they were never seen again. Two years later, after a lengthy investigation and court trial, Spanish colonial judges convicted fifteen municipal officers and native leaders of the Cajonos region of the murder of the *fiscales*. On 11 January 1702, the Cajonos rebels were executed, and their bodies drawn and quartered. Their remains were displayed on the Camino Real (royal highway), as a warning to would-be rebels and idolaters. Three hundred years later, in 2002, Pope John Paul II rewarded Angeles and Bautista—the “martyrs of Cajonos”—for their sacrifice on behalf of the Church by beati-fying them—often a first step toward sainthood—to the pride of some Zapotecs and the outrage of others. The intense debate about the meaning of the “martyrs’” life and death illustrates the degree to which the symbolic order constructed by Spanish colonialism in Oaxaca’s highlands has endured over time; more pointedly, it reveals the centrality to that system of meaning of native people who dealt closely with Spanish priests, administrators, and colonizers.

This book asks how native leaders in the district of Villa Alta, like the “martyred” priest’s assistants and “rebel” officials of San Francisco Cajonos, redefined native political leadership, shaped the dynamics of native rebellions, and co-constructed the symbolic order that allowed Spanish colonialism to endure for three hundred years. In the period that immediately followed the conquest of Mexico and Peru, the Catholic Church and the colonial state identified the native nobility as a caste of colonial intermediaries, who by virtue of their legitimacy among native peoples could help administer colonial society. What the Spaniards did not count on, however, were the limiting effects of the strong bonds of reciprocity between nobility and commoners. The sons of native nobles who learned to speak and write in Latin and Spanish and successfully petitioned the Crown to wear Spanish silks, carry a sword, and ride a horse had to answer not only to their Spanish overlords but also to the people who legitimated their authority in native society.

Through their roles in four colonial institutions—the *cabildo* (native municipal government), the *repartimiento* (the Spanish system of forced

labor and production), the Catholic Church, and the legal system—native leaders mediated between the competing demands of Spaniards and indigenous people. In the process, they made colonial systems work and created a hybrid colonial culture. Native governors made the colonial economy function through the collection of tribute and oversight of the repartimiento. At times, however, they stood up to abusive Spanish officials and shielded their pueblos from the kind of violence and coercion that might provoke a native rebellion. Native schoolmasters taught their fellow villagers the Christian doctrine and Spanish language, but under cover of night some led their communities in native rituals. Their dual role facilitated the intertwining of Catholicism and indigenous religion. Native legal agents petitioned the Real Audiencia (royal court) in Mexico City to censor the Spanish magistrate for his interference in cabildo elections, all the while pursuing the interests of their own political factions. In doing so, they secured the political power of their lineages but also made their pueblos dependent on the Spanish legal system.

In these double-edged roles, native leaders served as cultural intermediaries and political brokers. More specifically, they held the colonial order in balance: most often, they defused tensions in colonial society, but on occasion, as during the Cajonos Rebellion, the pressures were such that they abandoned the middle ground. In these moments, the violence of colonialism came to the fore, and the material and symbolic force of that violence—the drawing and quartering of the Cajonos rebels, for instance—shaped the work of native intermediaries for decades to come. In this regard, native intermediaries provide answers to two questions that have occupied a generation of historians of Latin America: How can we explain three hundred years of Spanish colonial rule given the absence of a standing army and the prevalence of stark inequalities?<sup>21</sup> Why, in certain instances, did native peoples rebel?<sup>22</sup> These questions are particularly relevant for regions at the edges of the Spanish Empire, such as the district of Villa Alta. In Villa Alta, until 1700 only 10 percent of the district's one hundred native pueblos had parish priests, and a mere one hundred and fifty Spaniards were clustered in the district seat, cut off from administrative and economic centers by rugged mountainous terrain. This handful of Spaniards lived in a sea of thirty to forty thousand native people. By necessity, the Spaniards of Villa Alta relied on local native elites to facilitate the region's colonial order. In turn, these native intermediaries won the grudge-

ing consent of the district's native subjects and secured a political legitimacy for themselves. But as the Cajonos Rebellion reveals in the starkest of terms, the colonial order that they built with their Spanish counterparts stood on shaky and shifting ground.

#### NATIVE INTERMEDIARIES

Intermediary figures, such as agents, interpreters, missionaries, advocates, and traders, intrigued and repelled contemporary observers as well as those who came after them. As people of considerable linguistic talent, cross-cultural sensibility, and sensitivity to the more subtle aspects of human communication, intermediaries evoked a world of mobility and fluid boundaries. They also inspired suspicion. Not fully rooted in any locality or social group yet comfortable and competent in opposing camps, during the age of conquest and colonialism these remarkable people traveled under the presumption of betrayal and treachery. Cross-cultural competence made their cultural and political loyalties suspect, and when situations went sour, they met closed doors, recrimination, legal sanction, or worse.

Throughout the history of Latin America, intermediary figures have played a prominent role in sewing together and exploiting the differences among the political, economic, and cultural interests of peoples of indigenous, African, mixed race, and European origins. During the colonial period, European or mixed race intermediaries most often sought to secure a position among the elite. The exploitative nature of colonialism, based on a hierarchy of race, produced a society characterized by gross inequalities, traceable along cultural and ethnic lines. In the colonial period, parish priests, local magistrates, and itinerant merchants of European origins generally maintained and reproduced these structures. Despite the ability of some to learn native languages, adopt certain aspects of native lifeways, and even sympathize with native peoples, their mediation most often had the interests of colonial power in view.

Native intermediaries present a more ambivalent moral, political, and cultural landscape than their European counterparts. Scholars rightly have represented colonialism as violent and exploitative, as the underbelly of Western narratives of European progress and rationality.<sup>3</sup> Correspondingly, open or violent resistance to colonialism has been portrayed in heroic terms, as a testimony to the agency and resilience of colonized peo-

ples. The social history scholarship of the last three decades, hand in hand with the almost century-long intellectual and political tradition of *indigenismo*, has valorized the culture, history, and experience of native peoples across Latin America, in particular in Mexico and Peru.<sup>4</sup> The immense contribution of this current of thought has provided a counternarrative to European triumphalism and has established a baseline for two generations of rich and innovative scholarship on native peoples. It has also obscured important aspects of colonial Latin American society. The heroic resistance implied by cultural survival, open defiance, and rebellion leaves little room for the ambivalence of cultural mediation. Whereas European intermediaries fit into our template for understanding colonialism, native intermediaries betray our expectations. At best, scholars have perceived them as enigmatic, but more often they have portrayed them as social climbers, tragic figures, power seekers, and lesser partners in the colonial enterprise.<sup>5</sup> In short, intellectual and popular discourses evince disillusionment with native intermediary figures.

No native intermediary figure has suffered more from disillusionment than Doña Marina, also known as La Malinche, the interpreter of Hernán Cortés, “conqueror” of Mexico. Doña Marina’s image in history, particularly as portrayed by Mexican nationalists and intellectuals, is that of the traitor and the oversexed Indian woman lusting after a white man. In Mexico, to be a “Malinchista” is to allow oneself to be corrupted by foreign influences; it is to betray one’s people. Octavio Paz, who emerged on the literary scene during the 1930s through the 1950s, when Mexican intellectuals were groping for answers to what they perceived to be Mexico’s persistent conundrum—its failure to take its place among the world’s “modern” nations—captured this attitude toward Doña Marina in “The Sons of La Malinche,” a chapter in his well-known book *The Labyrinth of Solitude*.<sup>6</sup>

Paz situated Doña Marina in what he perceived to be a national culture and national psychology of inferiority and self-abnegation, born in part of violent conquest. He wrote that for Mexicans, Doña Marina is “La Chingada,” the mother of the nation and “the mother forcibly opened, violated, or deceived.”<sup>7</sup> He insisted that as a result of her simultaneous victimhood and betrayal, “the Mexican people have not forgiven La Malinche.”<sup>8</sup> But whom did Doña Marina betray? She was a Nahua woman of noble origin, and as an adolescent, she was either sold (as a spoil of war) or

gifted (in order to cement alliance with Maya-speaking people. Following exile from her kin and homeland, she was passed along two more times among the Maya. The last of these people, the Chontal Maya of Tabasco, finally gifted her to Cortés. So who were Doña Marina's people? Were they the Nahuatl-speaking nobility of her home region of Coatzacoalcos, or were they the Maya who passed her on to strangers from across the sea? Or were they Cortés and his entourage? Here, at colonial Mexico's moment of inception, as we consider Doña Marina's loyalties, the categories of "Spaniard" and "Indian" and their correspondence to the terms *conqueror* and *conquered* have little meaning.

Bernal Diaz del Castillo, a foot soldier who accompanied Cortés, highlighted the importance of Doña Marina's role in the conquest of the Aztec Empire by devoting an entire chapter of his chronicle to her life story and service to the Spaniards. At the end of the chapter, he states, "I have made a point of telling this story, because without Doña Marina, we could not have understood the language of New Spain and Mexico."<sup>9</sup> Since so much of the conquest of Mexico involved almost constant negotiation, first among Cortés and the emissaries of Moctezuma, then among Cortés and the enemies of the Aztec Empire, the most important of whom were the Tlaxcalans, and finally between Cortés and Moctezuma himself, the role of Doña Marina cannot be overemphasized. Without language, negotiation, and native allies, it is unlikely that Cortés's small entourage could have survived long on Mexican shores. Indeed, as recent scholarship has shown, the conquest of Mexico was as much an Indian affair as it was a Spanish one.<sup>10</sup> At the time, the Tlaxcalans and other allies of the Spaniards viewed the war against the Aztec empire as their own military campaign. And perhaps Doña Marina viewed the Spaniards as her people, as much as the Nahua and Maya people who had given her away.

The venom reserved for La Malinche in Mexican nationalist discourse has as much to do with Doña Marina's gender and the mythical status of the conquest in the Mexican national imagination as with her role as interpreter and cultural intermediary. Yet the associations remain: the native interpreter—*la lengua*—as a treacherous figure without clear loyalties. But there is a reverse side to the perception of Doña Marina as traitor, a counterpoint provided by ethnohistorical perspectives. For example, Frances Karttunen has rehabilitated La Malinche as a "survivor." She argues that as a Nahua woman uprooted from any meaningful network or

community, La Malinche had to play by the rules of her overseers, whether the Chontal Maya or Cortés, in order to survive.<sup>11</sup> Her life possibilities diminished and her choices narrowed by her exile, Cortés presented her with an opportunity, and she filled the role required of her with aplomb. Karttunen's interpretation encourages us to consider that intermediaries were defined not only by their personal skills and attributes, but also by the dynamic and unpredictable situation on the ground, and their efforts and abilities to maximize the room for maneuver afforded by that situation. There have been other rehabilitations. Referring to Nahuatl renderings of the history of the Spanish invasion in the pictographic *Florentine Codex*, Matthew Restall argues that in the sixteenth century, "Malinche was portrayed neither as a victim, nor as immoral, but as powerful."<sup>12</sup> Camilla Townsend, in her analysis of the images of Malintzin (the Nahuatl name from which La Malinche was derived) in the native conquest pictorial, the Lienzo of Tlaxcala, argues the same.<sup>13</sup>

In her intermediary role, Doña Marina throws into question the categories of Spaniard and Indian, conqueror and conquered. She also represents the power of native intermediaries to ignite debate and produce divergent meanings. Yet the era in which La Malinche lived, the singular nature of the encounter that she mediated and, most important, her identity as an indigenous woman, set her apart from the native intermediaries who followed her. Over the course of the colonial period, as the Spanish state imposed a system of native government and a legal system that excluded indigenous women from roles like governor and interpreter general, and the Catholic Church came to rely exclusively on indigenous men as lay catechists and Church intermediaries, indigenous women became nearly invisible in the arena of formal institutional power.<sup>14</sup> As a result, indigenous men overwhelmingly exercised formal intermediary roles in both civil and ecclesiastical realms during the bulk of the colonial period.

The career of one of these men, Gaspar Antonio Chi, is worth examining because it provides a representative framework for understanding the balance of forces with which native intermediaries had to contend in colonial Mexico. Born sometime in the late 1520s into the noble Xiu lineage, Chi lived through the conquest of Yucatan, the Great Maya Revolt of 1546, and the violent and murderous Franciscan Inquisition of 1562 into Maya "idolatry" and alleged human sacrifice.<sup>15</sup> Like many of the native intermediaries of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Chi was edu-

cated in a Franciscan-run school for the sons of native nobility. The friars taught their native charges how to read and write Latin, Spanish, and their own native languages (in alphabetic writing). The objective was to create a cadre of schoolmasters who would teach their fellow natives the catechism and, just as important, would serve as Franciscan interpreters in the evangelical enterprise as well as agents and informants in the battle against “idolatry.”

What is striking about the career of Gaspar Antonio Chi, who served as interpreter for Franciscan *Provincial* Fray Diego de Landa and then for Landa’s great antagonist the bishop of Yucatan and Tabasco Francisco de Toral, and finally as governor of the Mani province, is the volatile political era in which he mediated among competing Spanish interests and competing Maya interests. When in 1562, rumors of human sacrifice and persistent idolatry reached Landa, a man who until this point had defended the Maya from the rapacity of Yucatan’s *encomenderos* (Spanish colonists given rights to Indian labor by the Crown), he received the news as if his favorite children had betrayed him. He and the Franciscans of the peninsula went on what can only be characterized as a punitive rampage. During this violent period, Landa’s interpreter, Chi, delivered countless sentences of torture, lashings, and hangings to both his own kinsmen of the Xiu lineage group and their mortal enemies, the Cocomos. One can only imagine what was going through the interpreter’s head as he translated those words to “his people,” the great Xiu lords. Had his education among the Franciscans erased his affinity for his Xiu roots? Was he totally committed to the Franciscan project?

Apparently not. Landa’s violent campaign against idolatry alarmed the Church hierarchy so much so that Bishop Toral was sent to Yucatan to investigate Landa and rein him in. He asked none other than Chi to serve as his interpreter during the investigation. In this role, Chi translated and notarized countless documents indicting Landa, his former boss, and the Franciscans who had educated him for their role in the needless deaths of hundreds of Maya men and women. The irony could not have been lost on any of the men involved. Eventually Landa was sent packing back to Spain. Chi continued his varied career by making use of his Franciscan education as a tutor to the brother of an *encomendero* in Tizimin, a town in Yucatan. Later, he became governor of his home Mani province, and toward the end of his life he served as a respondent to the *Relaciones Geográficas* of 1579–



81, a royal survey of Indian lands, history, and culture. At the end of his life, he petitioned the Spanish king for a royal pension in view of his service to the Crown.<sup>16</sup>

We can only speculate as to the motives that drove Chi's stunning and unpredictable career. His actions and their context, however, are undeniable. Chi used his cross-cultural skills to leverage power, with serious consequences for local rule in Yucatan. Although it was not his choice to attend the Franciscan school, the skills he acquired there were indispensable to shaping a political situation in which the ground was constantly shifting. His acceptance of Toral's invitation to serve as his interpreter demonstrates a shrewd reading of the fluid power play of the colonial period in Yucatan. Having chosen the "winning" side, Chi participated in neutralizing what had been a dominant Franciscan power in the peninsula, and creating a more balanced relationship among the Franciscans, civil authority, and *encomenderos* of the region. Such a situation—in which the competing interests of the colonizers checked and balanced one another, and in which Chi as a broker and intermediary could play one off of the other—would prove more auspicious for him as a native governor. It also proved more favorable for the success of colonialism in Yucatan. Putting the brakes on the relentless Franciscan extirpation campaign—an unsustainable state of affairs given growing Maya resentment—avoided the very real possibility of a Maya rebellion. Chi shaped the balance of power of colonial institutions and shifted the delicate tension from overt Spanish violence and Maya rebellion to a *Pax Hispanica*.

#### CULTURAL MEDIATION AND VIOLENCE

The example of Gaspar Antonio Chi underscores the point that colonial power was not monolithic. Skillful native intermediaries could profitably exploit divisions among missionary orders, a secular Church hierarchy, Spanish colonists, local magistrates, the viceroy, and the Crown. They could also exploit divisions among native peoples: their rival lineage groups, communities, and *caciques*. In this regard, the term *survivor*, which Karttunen has also applied to Chi, appears insufficient.<sup>17</sup> Both Doña Marina and Chi did more than survive and interpret: they negotiated, brokered, and played decisive roles in changing the local societies in which they lived.

The complexity of forces with which native intermediaries had to con-

tend constrained them; they were not free agents. Their social context in combination with their communicative skills situated them as brokers and negotiators, and as such, their positions entailed considerable power and risk. Daniel Richter has applied network theory to his analysis of “cultural brokers” in seventeenth-century New York in an effort to understand more precisely the social context that allowed intermediary figures to connect local systems to centers of power. Richter argues that cultural brokers could leverage power because of their “simultaneous membership in two or more interacting networks (kin groups, political factions, communities, or other formal or informal coalitions).”<sup>18</sup> Their position in multiple networks and coalitions meant that they were both varyingly situated and not situated at all: they occupied an “intermediate position, one step removed from final responsibility in decision making.”<sup>19</sup>

In Richter’s examination of the brokerage of New York–Iroquois relations in the late seventeenth century, negotiations by cultural brokers helped to consolidate the relationship among native groups with heterogeneous interests and two competing colonial powers (the Dutch and the English). In New Spain, from the mid-sixteenth century forward, the power relationships were much clearer. The Spaniards had claimed military victory (tentatively in some of the “peripheral” regions, but with confidence in the “centers”) and had established the foundations of their colonial state. But the shape of local rule remained to be decided, and this is where native intermediaries played a considerable role in connecting the colonial state to localities. Their negotiations secured a role for them as local rulers and a role for the colonial state in local affairs.

Participating in social networks from an intermediate position required not only considerable communicative skills but also a “tactical” sensibility. Whereas a strategy is most often formulated from a space outside of and prior to direct engagement with an opponent or enemy, tactics are formulated from within, during contact. Michel de Certeau has applied “tactics,” most often associated with warfare, to quotidian social relations, and in particular to acts of communication. He defines “tactics” as an “antidiscipline,” an antidote to Foucault’s vision of the totalizing and disciplinary power of the state. “Tactics” are the subtle, everyday actions undertaken by individuals to navigate, resist, and subvert authority. Although language and symbols provide the tactical arsenal for de Certeau’s antidiscipline, he encourages us to move from a “linguistic” to a “polemological” frame in

which acts of communication stand in for “battles” or “games” between social unequals.<sup>20</sup> This framework illuminates the work of native intermediaries, whose power rested in skillful and tactical communication with people who wielded considerable power. For example, in the cases of Doña Marina and Gaspar Antonio Chi, language, translation, and, for Chi, alphabetic literacy played vital roles in their negotiations with Spaniards and native lords. But as important as were their linguistic skills, the wider context of the communicative acts, such as comportment, performance, and cross-cultural competence proved equally critical to their success as intermediary figures. Here, the difference between language and discourse is critical. If we accept that discourse embodies a culturally specific system of signification (linguistic and nonlinguistic), then a facility with a range of Spanish and native discourses and their effective deployment constituted the primary tactics of cultural brokerage.

Richter has also examined the question of tactics, though independently of de Certeau’s theoretical frame. He posits that the intermediate political and cultural space in which cultural brokers operated provided them with significant room for maneuver, which in turn occasionally led them to “promise more than they could deliver.”<sup>21</sup> These “promises” proved a secret to successful brokerage. Richter’s concept of “promise” fits well with the case of native intermediaries in colonial Latin America. Through their promises, native intermediaries opened a political space in which they could “promote the aims of one group while protecting the interests of another—and thus become nearly indispensable to all sides.”<sup>22</sup> Through their promises and negotiations, native intermediaries bound native pueblos to the colonial state, and its right arm, the Catholic Church. As community leaders and cabildo officers, they were responsible for defending their pueblos from abuses *and* delivering tribute to the Crown, for maintaining reciprocal relations between their communities and the gods *and* making sure that their fellow villagers attended Catholic mass. Fulfilling these competing demands enhanced political legitimacy, social status, and material wealth. When the competing constituencies in question called native intermediaries to account, however, the political space closed around them, imperiled their intermediary role, and upset the fragile balance of power that they had negotiated.

Rolena Adorno has traced and analyzed the rhetorical strategies of native intermediary figures in her study of the written work of Guaman Poma

de Ayala, Garcilaso de la Vega, and Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl.<sup>23</sup> All of them lived in the seventeenth century, the first two in Peru, the last in Mexico, and all were products of the unions between Spanish conquerors and indigenous nobility. Despite their bicultural origins and their facility with Spanish language and customs, they remained rooted in an indigenous social context, largely because of Spanish social prejudice against *mestizos* and because of inheritance laws that privileged the children of the conquerors' Spanish wives over those of their indigenous wives or partners. In the face of this growing social and legal discrimination, these native chroniclers used the Spanish discourses of *relaciones de méritos y servicios* (accounts of merit and service) and *probanzas* (testimonies) of services rendered to the Crown to construct written defenses of the indigenous past and present. They established their legitimacy for their Spanish audience by using Spanish narrative genres, claiming fidelity to Christianity, and, in the case of Garcilaso de la Vega, reconstructing the Andean past as a prelude to the Catholic colonial present, much in the way that Renaissance humanists had recast classical antiquity as the seedbed for Christianity. By drawing on discourses intelligible to an official Spanish audience, ones that would be read sympathetically by Spaniards, they defended the rights and claims of their noble lineages, and in the case of the Andean chroniclers, countered discourses of idolatry which threatened to marginalize all indigenous people as "consorts of the devil."

Adorno aptly characterizes these men as "ethnographers" and "historians" of native culture and as "cultural mediators." The native chroniclers deployed writing and Spanish discourse to communicate a favorable cultural and historical identity for themselves, their lineage groups, and the societies of which they claimed to be a part in order to sway official opinion, attitudes, and ultimately, policy. In this regard, they provide a paradigmatic example of cultural brokerage. The analytical utility of their chronicles is limited, however, by the rarefied niche of these men and the relatively small number of such elaborately constructed texts. Further, Adorno's textually centered approach, which attempts to understand the chroniclers' colonial subjectivity, but probes little into the social relations and political struggles behind the text, leaves one with the impression of these men as individuals mediating in a space between two autonomous social and cultural groups. As a result, cultural legitimization appears to be a one-way process, as the native authors utilized their texts to appeal to the Crown.

In most contexts, native intermediaries had to appeal to at least two audiences who were often at odds: Spanish colonial officials and their own corporate groups. Native officials, priest's assistants, interpreters, and legal agents had to balance these competing accountabilities and construct a two-way legitimacy for themselves in order to maintain their positions as servants to the Crown and leaders of their communities. In regions like the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, where colonial power was less centralized and more contested, they established their bifurcated legitimacy by forging a particular kind of relationship between their region and the state. This relationship is captured best by the concept of a fragile "colonial bargain": a degree of native political and cultural autonomy in exchange for a grudging consent.<sup>24</sup>

The cultural mediation performed by native intermediaries existed in tension with low-level and endemic violence, on the one hand, and the threat of more overt or organized forms of violence, on the other. As Murdo MacLeod has noted, in Spanish America, "revolts were rare, but violence was frequent," generalized, and underreported.<sup>25</sup> Some examples of this persistent undercurrent of violence include crime and punishment, domestic violence, whippings, floggings, and the many forms of psychic violence that accompanied colonialism. This undercurrent was related to the violent forms of peasant resistance that have captured the imagination of colonial historians: native rebellions.<sup>26</sup> Under certain conditions, floggings by priests or magistrates for failure to attend mass or meet repartimiento quotas could lead to localized uprisings or wider rebellion.

The fact and threat of violence, combined with the value that native peoples placed on local autonomy, positioned native intermediaries in a role complementary to that of state makers: they were also gatekeepers. Often, the objective of their political and legal activity was to keep the Church and state out of community life, and to mitigate against violence, objectives that required them to position themselves against parish priests or the Spanish magistrate. In regions where Spanish magistrates exerted their power through constant extortion and coercion, a political culture developed, characterized by "a steady but minor tension . . . which was never resolved but provoked a constant rumble of violence."<sup>27</sup> As this book will demonstrate, in certain moments, indigenous intermediaries could not hold violence at bay, and when it raged out of control, the political space that they had achieved through their promises and tactics closed,

and they either positioned themselves as leaders in moments of violent resistance, or became primary targets of that violence.

#### INDIAN IDENTITY

The construction of a state system in Spanish America that could incorporate a loose confederation of culturally and ethnically heterogeneous peoples and achieve political consent owed a debt to medieval Iberia, where local semiautonomy and cultural and ethnic pluralism were legally recognized through municipal *fueros* (charters). This arrangement was transplanted to Spanish America with some modifications that allowed for a legal distinction between Spaniards and Indians, which the Spanish Crown institutionalized in the sixteenth century by creating two independent republics: the republic of Indians and the republic of Spaniards.

According to Spanish law, Indians held special status as wards of the Crown. In the early years that followed the conquest, death by disease and the excesses of *encomenderos* convinced the Spanish Crown that it should position itself between Spanish colonists and its indigenous subjects. The alternative might well have been widespread native rebellion and/or a continued native population decline, both of which would have posed serious problems for the Crown's evangelical and economic objectives. The Crown thus designated Indians as minors, perpetual children in need of protection from the abuses of Spaniards, *criollos* (American-born Spaniards), and people of mixed race (*mestizos* and *castas*). As wards of the Crown, they had privileges. For example, they were protected from slavery, were exempt from the Inquisition, and enjoyed limited political autonomy; non-Indians were not allowed to live in their *pueblos*. The Crown recognized communal rights to certain *pueblo* lands by issuing legal titles, and it established a special legal body, the General Indian Court, to address native grievances and conflicts.<sup>28</sup>

In colonial Spanish America, then, the term *indio* denoted a legal category, and did not map fully on to the concept of "race" in its nineteenth-century meaning, although it anticipated modern discourses of "race."<sup>29</sup> For example, the Iberian concept of "lineage," which referred to "bloodline," intersected with the legal definition of *indio* as a marker of social and cultural difference. Lineage marked differences among Spaniards, Jews, Moriscos, Indians, and Africans, and at the same time, it delineated social status (*calidad*), thereby distinguishing among nobility and commoners.

Although lineage marked difference in terms of group identities and qualities considered essential to those groups, it is important to note that lineage did not represent a biological category of difference. For this reason, Irene Silverblatt situates the Iberian discourse of difference, based in part on legal distinctions, and in part on lineage, as “race thinking.”<sup>30</sup>

The category *indio* belonged to the colonial *sistema de castas* (caste system), which organized colonial society into a protoracial hierarchy according to their proportion of Spanish blood. The system emerged in response to the growing racial and socioeconomic complexity of the Spanish colonies during the second half of the sixteenth century. Three basic categories of difference—*indio*, *negro*, and *español*—provided the poles of the system, with anywhere from seven to forty categories of race mixture in-between. The exact origins of the caste system remain shadowy; most scholars pinpoint the mid-seventeenth century as the period during which it took institutional form. Immigration of Spaniards (many of them poor), increasing importation of African slaves, and growing “race-mixture” threatened the social exclusivity of Spanish and creole elites. The caste system provided a means by which to maintain social exclusivity in the face of blurring racial boundaries, and the growing dissymmetry between race and class due to the emergence of economically prosperous castas and the declining fortunes of some poor creoles. In theory, the caste system would encourage racial endogamy and insure that if race mixing occurred, the “cream” would rise to the top through a process of whitening. A premium on whiteness meant that poor Spaniards and creoles would be at the top of plebeian society, and that wealthy creoles and Spaniards would be at the top of the entire pyramid.<sup>31</sup> Most historians concede that this classificatory scheme did not work so neatly in social practice.

The relationship between the complex colonial social order on the ground and the colonial principles of social classification has been hotly debated by historians. Relying largely on quantitative analyses of marriage records, social historians in the 1970s and 1980s argued over the relative weight of caste (which they conflated with colonial racial cum legal categories) versus class in determining social hierarchy. Their approach to social identity was largely etic (focusing on ascribed status), and the debate centered on the degree of social mobility in a caste system prescribed by elites.<sup>32</sup>

More recent social historical and cultural approaches to the *sistema de*

castas have transformed our understandings of race, class, and ethnicity by asking about the meaning and perception of racial categories, and the degree to which they were accepted or resisted by colonial subalterns.<sup>33</sup> This bottom-up approach led to a greater emphasis on ethnicity in colonial society; that is, how people produced and understood their own group identities through acknowledgment of shared history, territory, language, and religion, and how those identities provided a basis for social cohesion, conflict, and political claims.<sup>34</sup> Scholars came to recognize the fluid and “protean” nature of ethnic identities in colonial Latin America, and the ways they intersected with class, wealth, status, social occupation, and other markers of social identity.<sup>35</sup> In this light, the meaning of *indio* as a racial category depended in large part on its relationship to other social categories, like “Zapotec,” “cacique” (native señorial lord), and “merchant.”

In this book, I build on the cultural approach to race and ethnicity, which recognizes their interpenetration and the plurality of factors that determined social stratification in Spanish colonial society. As a rural colonial “periphery,” the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca provides a different kind of historical setting than has been characteristic of most studies of race and ethnicity, which have focused on racially diverse and socially stratified urban and mining centers. In the sierra, the small size of *cacicazgos* (noble estates) and the relative lack of valuable resources meant that the gap between indigenous nobility and commoners was defined more by lineage and status than by wealth or class.<sup>36</sup> A plurality of ethnolinguistic groups made the Sierra Norte ethnically diverse, but the region was not racially diverse. Due to a very small Spanish, mestizo, and African presence, political and cultural struggle was primarily either an interindigenous or an indigenous-Spanish affair, and it often centered on a contestation of the racial and cultural categories of Indian and Spanish, and their related identities. As I will show throughout the book, the Zapotec, Mixe, and Chinantec people of the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca had their own systems of social organization and hierarchy, which they put to use in local governance, collective ritual, inter- and intrapueblo conflict and alliance, and disputes within the Spanish legal system. These varying forms of ethnic identity existed in tension with the racial category of *indio*.

In the Sierra Norte, in lieu of a fully functioning sistema de castas, Spaniards produced an informal classificatory scheme for “Indians,” defined by the interpenetration of ethnicity and cultural traits. As such, the



category *indio* was multilayered and locally specific, cross-cut by other Spanish categories of indigenous identity, such as *pueblo* (a self-governing, semiautonomous municipality, officially recognized by the Crown) and *nación* (nation). For example, the Indian pueblos that made up the republic of Indians were each entitled to elect their own cabildos. In matters of local governance, the Spanish state respected the autonomy of local custom (*costumbre*) if it did not contradict Catholicism. The preservation of local autonomy and custom in the native pueblo provided a bulwark against the cultural and ethnic homogenization implied by the overarching category of the “republic of Indians.” *Nación* represented another collective category created by the Spanish state that mitigated against the homogenization implied by *indio* while reflecting Iberian notions of difference. As Lomnitz-Adler describes, “the Spanish concept of *nación* (nation) referred to a community of blood and it was distinct from the notion of *patria* (fatherland), which was merely the place where a person was born.”<sup>37</sup> But the concept of *nación* could not be so easily disentangled from *patria*, as it folded language, region, and culture into the notion of lineage. So, for example, in the Sierra Norte, Spaniards referred to six different *naciones*: there was (in Spanish) the *nación* Zapoteco, which included the *naciones* Cajonos, Nexitzo, and Bijanos (three different strains of Sierra Zapotec language). There were also the *naciones* Mixe and Chinanteco. To each of these categories, Spanish Church and civil officials attributed certain kinds of cultural characteristics: for example, the “Indians” of the “*nación* Cajonos” were known to be “idolaters.”

The cultural labeling of groups of “Indians” was a critical, and until recently, understudied classificatory scheme in the Spanish colonial state’s overlapping hierarchies of difference, one that this book’s analysis will further illuminate. There were officially recognized *indios conquistadores* (Indian conquerors) who had special privileges, and on the other end of the spectrum, there were *indios bárbaros* (wild or barbaric Indians) who had yet to be “conquered.”<sup>38</sup> Spanish officials recognized the rights and privileges of *indios principales* (Indian notables), and judges accorded greater weight to their testimony than to that of native commoners. Spaniards also created unofficial categories of “Indianness.” Indians whom Spaniards considered to be “loyal vassals” and “good Christians” reinforced colonial ideals of political expropriation of native peoples and their successful conversion. Conversely, Spaniards projected their deepest colonial fears on

Indians who were “rebels” and “idolaters.” Finally, there was the category in-between: *indios ladinos* (hispanized Indians). For Spaniards and native peoples, *indios ladinos* represented the ambivalence and ambiguity of colonial society. With a foot in either world, these intermediary figures were assigned significant cultural baggage and remained under intense suspicion by Spanish officials and native people alike.

The Spanish colonial state’s creation of the category *indio* thus co-existed uneasily with its recognition of ethnic and cultural pluralism, and it created serious tensions in Spanish colonial governance. In their interactions with the colonial state, Spanish America’s native intermediaries profitably exploited the dissonances in “Indian” identity in pursuit and defense of variably defined collective interests and identities. The dissonances in colonial Indian identity still lie at the heart of the relationship between Latin America’s indigenous peoples and their respective states.<sup>39</sup> For this reason, colonial histories of indigenous peoples in Latin America are taking on increased significance as they enrich our understanding of the political, legal, cultural, and economic contexts in which indigenous peoples today “define themselves and their political projects.”<sup>40</sup> One of the objectives of this book is to elucidate native intermediaries’ political use of a multiplicity of “Indian” identities, and how their work shaped these identities’ fluid nature.

#### LOCAL RULE

Native intermediaries parlayed the Spanish colonial state’s lack of a monopoly on violence and the unevenness of its territorial hegemony into considerable political and cultural power for themselves. A glance at a map of the colony of New Spain would lead one to believe that the Spaniards controlled the territory from Baja California in the west across a rough line to Florida in the east, and south through all of present-day Mexico and Central America to the Isthmus of Panama. But maps can be deceiving. A more realistic representation of the geography of Spanish power would be blotchy. Mexico City, Puebla, Veracruz, and the mining centers to the north would stand out in greatest relief, and would be integrated through corridors or trunks of transportation and communication. Other regions would recede in varying gradations, depending on the exports that they could offer. This map, defined by the relationship of economic “cores” or “centers” to economic “peripheries,” represents one way to conceptualize the geography of Spanish colonialism.<sup>41</sup>

The economic designations of “center” and “periphery” are undermined, however, by considerations of politics and culture. As Ida Altman has put it, “perception defined core and periphery as much as distance and resources.”<sup>42</sup> For example, Spaniards in “peripheral” regions longed for a taste of the metropolitan culture available in the colonial centers, and felt their geographical and economic distance from the center in terms of a lack. Indigenous peoples, on the other hand, enjoyed the cultural and political autonomy that such distance afforded, and as a result of that distance had the space to negotiate with, resist, or ignore state institutions in the interest of maintaining local autonomy.

From a politico-economic perspective, the district of Villa Alta in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca rested on the periphery of the Spanish colonial system, yet the *repartimiento* (system of forced production) of cochineal dye (*grana de cochinilla*) and cotton cloth (*mantas*) contributed significantly to the economic vitality of New Spain. As in other “peripheral” regions of New Spain and Guatemala with dense indigenous populations, the *repartimiento* was Villa Alta’s primary economic engine, and generated a system of production and trade internal to the colony, as well as the production of valuable exports. In this manner, the system linked “peripheral” regional economies to the wider trans-Atlantic trade.

The Spaniards of Villa Alta established the *repartimiento* in the decades that followed the conquest. The system did not reach its peak production, however, until the eighteenth century. The system functioned in two main modes: as credit, and as a commercial transaction between Spanish agents of the *repartimiento* and indigenous producers. In Villa Alta and in Oaxaca in general, the *repartimiento* represented a system of forced production and consumption known as the *repartimiento de efectos* or *mercancías*, not to be confused with the labor draft also known as the *repartimiento*.<sup>43</sup> Jeremy Baskes has challenged the notion that the *repartimiento* in Oaxaca was coercive, arguing that it provided peasants with badly needed credit, and that as a result, peasant producers entered into the system voluntarily. Baskes’s economic analysis reveals much about the previously unknown particulars of the *repartimiento*, but it does not take into account sufficiently the politics of the *repartimiento*, and the underlying coerciveness that defined Spanish-indigenous relations in Oaxaca. Further, Baskes acknowledges that in the collection of *repartimiento* debts, *alcaldes mayores* (Spanish magistrates) and their intermediaries often resorted to violence and coercion.<sup>44</sup>

The remarkable profitability of trade in cochineal and cotton cloth made Oaxaca one of the most lucrative regions in New Spain. Only the silver mining centers of Zacatecas and Guanajuato could provide greater profits to the Spanish magistrate lucky enough to get the post. The *alcaldía mayor* (office of *alcalde mayor*) of Villa Alta was therefore one of the most expensive in the colony, second only to the *alcaldía mayor* of Jicaya, Oaxaca, which also derived its value and high price from cochineal production.<sup>45</sup> In this regard, as a “periphery,” the district of Villa Alta occupied a paradoxical position in Spanish America, captured by the term *internal periphery*.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the economic value assigned to the region and the riches that it offered to Spanish administrators, Spaniards considered the district of Villa Alta a cultural backwater. But for the indigenous people who lived there, it was a geographic, political, economic, and cosmic center. The indigenous society that made up the district of Villa Alta (including Zapotec, Mixe, and Chinantec ethnic groups) differed from the long-established, urbanized, and densely hierarchical pre-Hispanic societies that were found in central Mexico, the Mixteca, or in the Valley of Oaxaca. Indeed, Sierra Zapotec settlements appear to have been only recently established at the time of the Spanish invasion. Through close examination of Sierra Zapotec *lienzos* (genealogical records, maps, and histories transposed onto a tapestry-like form), Michel Oudijk has argued that Sierra Zapotec society emerged from political instability and warfare in the Valley of Oaxaca during the late postclassic period (1350–1521). This situation set off waves of migration to both the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and the Sierra Norte in the century prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. It appears that valley nobles migrated to the sierra with their followers in groups that native people referred to in later Spanish documentation as “parentelas,” “cónyuges,” or “primos” (all of which loosely translate as “lineage groups”),<sup>47</sup> and that Spaniards later referred to as “parcialidades.” Upon arrival, they divided territory and established settlements, known in Zapotec as “yetze.” There was a basic division in these settlements between nobles and commoners, but it appears that the finer social distinctions that characterized indigenous society in the valley of Oaxaca, the Mixteca, and Mexico’s central valleys did not exist.<sup>48</sup>

Genealogical relationships dating from the original parentelas loosely bound the new populations, but these linkages never reached the complex-

ity or depth of those of the Valley of Oaxaca. Intermarriage and other forms of alliance could not form deep roots due to the relatively short period between parentela settlement and the Spanish conquest (less than a century). As a result, small-scale, loosely interrelated *cacicazgos* (noble estates) and relative autonomy characterized political and territorial relations among Sierra Zapotec settlements.<sup>49</sup> The ethos of autonomy among sierra communities was bolstered by the fact that the sierra never fell under the direct control of the Aztec Empire.

We know less about the history of the Mixe and Chinantec peoples who inhabited the Sierra Norte. In his classic ethnology of the Mixe, Ralph Beals notes that prior to the Spanish invasion, some of the eastern Mixe had contact with Maya speakers, though little is known about how much cultural exchange occurred between the two groups. Beals characterizes Mixe and Chinantec societies as “simpler” than those of the Zapotecs of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and the Valley of Oaxaca, and notes that their rugged geography limited contact with outsiders.<sup>50</sup> More recently, Frank Lipp has argued that the Mixe-Zoque–speaking peoples “played an integral role in the formation of the Olmec,” the first major “civilization” of Mesoamerica, and more broadly, in the development of Mesoamerican culture.<sup>51</sup>

The ethnic diversity of the Sierra Norte was unusual in New Spain for an area of its size (12,700 square kilometers).<sup>52</sup> Ethnic divisions led to bitter warfare in the pre-Hispanic period, particularly among the Zapotecs and the Mixes, but also between Zapotecs and Chinantecs. Linguistic diversity complicated matters even further. Among the Sierra Zapotecs who resided in the district, three variants of Zapotec were spoken: Nexitzo, Cajonos, and Bijanos. The mountainous terrain isolated these Zapotec peoples from one another and most likely contributed to the development of this remarkable linguistic diversity.<sup>53</sup>

This geography played a role in separating the Sierra Norte from other regions of Mexico in both the pre-Hispanic period and afterward. Layers of mountains isolated the region from the Valley of Oaxaca. The difficult terrain combined with fierce local resistance made the Spanish conquest of the sierra a prolonged and bloody affair. Spanish conquistadors had to make at least three attempts to subdue and pacify the region. The first two forays, led by Rodrigo de Rangel in 1523–24, met with some initial success until native rebellion forced the Spaniards to retreat. A third campaign in

1526, led by Gaspar Pacheco and Diego de Figueroa, owed its partial success to the extreme force used by the Spaniards, most notably the deployment of mastiffs to hunt and devour Indian rebels, and the participation of a few hundred native allies from central Mexico. A war raging between the Zapotecs and Mixes of the region also contributed to the eventual military success of the Spaniards and their indigenous allies.<sup>54</sup> During the following year (1527), Pacheco and Figueroa established the Spanish seat of power at San Ildefonso de Villa Alta. The tiny settlement of Spaniards in Villa Alta (which never exceeded thirty families)<sup>55</sup> and its central Mexican native allies spent much of the sixteenth century attempting to achieve stability and establish the most basic foundations of colonial rule.

Once the region had been pacified militarily, the Spaniards carved the district's indigenous population into *encomiendas* (grants of labor and tribute rights given by the Crown) and initiated a regime of forced labor that resulted in a rebellion centered in the Nextizo Zapotec community of Tiltepec in 1531. The Spaniards and the Indian conquerors responded swiftly and cruelly, torturing and executing a number of community leaders. The Indian conquerors proved the centrality of their role in the prolonged conquest of the sierra as they helped the Spaniards to put down a general rebellion that shook the region in 1550, a second uprising that erupted in Choapan in 1552, and a fierce Mixe rebellion in 1570. The overwhelmingly destructive effects of epidemic disease on the indigenous population cannot be overemphasized as a factor in Spanish military success. In 1548, the region's population numbered 95,851. Twenty years later, this figure was reduced by a third. The indigenous population would eventually stabilize at between 30,000 and 40,000 (at its height in the eighteenth century).<sup>56</sup> The disarray of indigenous society and political leadership that accompanied the Great Dying eventually broke the back of native resistance in the Sierra Norte and facilitated the consolidation of Spanish power.<sup>57</sup>

Among the Spaniards of Villa Alta, the *alcalde mayor* held the most powerful post. Throughout the colonial period, the *alcalde mayor* served as the district's highest judge in civil and criminal affairs, and was responsible to the Crown, and at some levels to the Church, in matters concerning the administration and control of the region's indigenous population. His administrative responsibilities included the enforcement of rules of productive labor, land use, residency, and social order in Indian pueblos. In the judicial realm, he served as criminal judge, police commissioner, and

royal investigator, and the arbiter of property relations and land transactions. Financial responsibilities accompanied administrative and judicial duties. The *alcalde mayor* was the guardian of the regional economy, supervising tribute collection, regional markets, and the local weights and measures used in market transactions.<sup>58</sup> But the small number of Spaniards available to fill the district's civil bureaucracy hampered the *alcalde mayor's* ability to fulfill the duties of his office, that is, to impose full social control in the region. For governing and for the administration of the *repartimiento*, the magistrate and the Spanish *vecinos* (residents) of Villa Alta relied largely on indigenous governors of the district's *pueblos de indios*.

The small size of the Spanish settlement and its anemic civil bureaucracy made the role of the Dominican missionaries who evangelized and administered the region from the military conquest until 1700 central to the colonial enterprise. But small numbers plagued the Dominican administration as well. Until 1700, less than 10 percent of the *pueblos* in the district of Villa Alta (around one hundred total) had a resident priest.<sup>59</sup> In this regard, the Dominican order, which served as a parallel state structure in the region, was also limited in its ability to establish social control. In order to be effective at all, the Dominicans had to form a partnership of sorts with the region's native nobility, a strategy that empowered native intermediaries, and complemented their mediating roles in the colonial economy and *cabildo*.

For Spaniards, then, the Sierra Norte was indeed a "periphery." But from the perspective of the Zapotec, Mixe, and Chinantec peoples who lived there, an alternative geography of ritual and political centers, markets (*tianguis*), and a spiritual topography of physical features of the land, such as mountaintops and caves, lent the region its own "central place hierarchy."<sup>60</sup> Maintenance of the semiautonomy of this indigenous world in the face of colonial pressures required native intermediaries to negotiate with the Spanish state and the Catholic Church. Through their negotiations, native intermediaries achieved more than the immediate goal of local autonomy; they actively shaped colonial political culture and the state itself. But negotiation produced a countervailing effect that worked against the objectives of political and cultural autonomy: by engaging with colonial institutions, native intermediaries brought the district of Villa Alta into the orbit of the state, creating a dialectic between local autonomy and colonial

rule. This process was critical to the cohesion of empire. In this regard, this book examines the contradictions that inhered in the negotiations between “periphery” and “center,” and considers how the intermediary figures responsible for those negotiations shaped forms of local rule.

#### SOURCES AND METHODS

The historical sources available for the Sierra Norte make it an attractive case study. The district archive of Villa Alta, housed in the Archivo del Poder Judicial in Oaxaca City, is one of the best documented in Mexico, distinctive both for its depth and breadth: it encompasses legal documentation, civil and criminal, for approximately one hundred pueblos de indios from the mid-seventeenth century through the national period. The Archivo del Poder Ejecutivo in Oaxaca City contains more cases from the region, as does the Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia. The Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City provides documentation of appeals, the petitions of native nobility for special privileges, and other business that required mediation by the Real Audiencia. Finally, the Archivo General de las Indias (AGI) in Seville, Spain, boasts a rich collection of Oaxaca-related documents that recount conflicts and problems of governance overseen by the Council of the Indies. For this book, I used AGI documents that concerned two native rebellions, the administration of the Dominican order, the secular hierarchy’s efforts to overhaul Dominican administration after 1700, Bourbon linguistic policy, and the privileges of the “Indian conquerors” of the sierra.

The rich ethnographic details that abound in the criminal and civil suits of Villa Alta have allowed me to connect the micropolitical to the macropolitical: to analyze the complexities of local politics and culture at close range and to examine the ways that native intermediaries articulated local concerns in a wider colonial context. Disputes can be traced over the span of decades, and alliances and conflicts can be mapped across linguistic regions. The careers of native intermediary figures and Spanish political and cultural brokers appear in three dimensions, as their names and signatures sprawl across a range of documentation. Through thick description and textual interpretation, I have attempted to bring these fascinating figures to life and to chronicle their roles in the quotidian tensions and conflicts that constituted colonial political culture.

My methodology is eclectic, borrowing from the disciplines of history



and anthropology. I owe a debt to the rich tradition of colonial Latin American social history, ethnohistory, and historical anthropology. The call to study intermediary figures, issued specifically by William Taylor, grew out of this social historical and ethnohistorical tradition.<sup>61</sup> To understand the social networks that, in the words of Taylor, “connected localities to wider colonial systems,” I piece together the fragmentary evidence of social networks, alliances, and rivalries that appears in the documents. I also pay close attention to how indigenous people identified themselves, and how others identified them (i.e., as belonging to a *parcialidad*, *pueblo*, or *nación*) in an effort to reconstruct a social history of Indian identity in the Sierra Norte.

Cultural history, with its focus on language and representation, has also influenced this book’s methodology. For example, one of the central threads in the book is an interrogation of the term *indio ladino* (hispanized Indian). Studying Spanish correspondence and writing, indigenous testimony, and court-mandated witness identification, I analyze how the meaning of the term changed over time, and how it operated in a larger system of colonial representation. My focus on the political rhetoric of Spanish and indigenous officials and witnesses owes a debt to a growing subdiscipline in Latin American studies that focuses on political culture.<sup>62</sup> With an eye to the dynamics of colonial courtrooms, I use court cases to examine how people made arguments, communicated conflicts, presented themselves, and, through performance, constructed situational identities. Finally, I borrow from postcolonial theory. In a wider sense, the book explores how Spanish colonialism worked through language and how native peoples used Spanish discourses to subvert or use to their advantage Spanish notions of Indian identity.

In keeping with the book’s focus on language, William Roseberry’s reading of Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony provides one of the theoretical underpinnings of the book’s methodology. Gramsci argued that hegemony—subordination and exploitation in the absence of overwhelming coercion—can be explained by the creation of a common set of understandings and values that united antagonistic classes on one level, and the people and the state on another.<sup>63</sup> Roseberry has argued that the “consent” implied by Gramsci’s model does not mean the absence of struggle, nor is it static. Cultural and political struggles contribute to an ongoing reformulation of the terms of “consent,” and hegemony constitutes a “common mate-

rial and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination.”<sup>64</sup> “Consent” thus coexists with resistance, and the signs and symbols meant to articulate the common understandings of hegemony can have alternative meanings across class and ethnic lines.<sup>65</sup> The common meaningful framework that constitutes hegemony also provides the tools for its transformation and even subversion.

Through legal and political struggles with the Church and state, native intermediaries shaped a hegemonic system in New Spain. Court records are ideal for analyzing this process because the courtroom, with its mutually understood procedures and language, constituted a common meaningful framework in which the tensions among, race, ethnicity, and cultural competence were hashed out. The court was a public space and, as such, a space for performance and micropolitics. Spanish, the language of the conquerors, was the hegemonic language, but native peoples learned to use it—often quite masterfully—in counterhegemonic ways.

#### GENDER AND INDIGENOUS WOMEN’S HISTORY

Indigenous women intermediaries are notably absent from this book. Part of the problem relates to observations made earlier: during the colonial period, Spanish notions of gender and power excluded indigenous women from intermediary roles in formal institutions, such as the Church, the *cabildo*, the *repartimiento*, and the legal system. Indigenous women did continue to exert power as *cacicas*, property holders, testators, plaintiffs, defendants, witnesses, and market vendors, but their power was often mediated by men: their husbands, legal representatives, or *cabildo*. Laura Lewis has shown that *casta* women, including indigenous women, played important intermediary roles in informal and forbidden aspects of colonial society, such as healing and witchcraft.<sup>66</sup> Matthew Restall and Marta Espejo-Ponce Hunt have argued that by learning Spanish ways and language, and teaching their own ways to “many a Spaniard,” Maya women served as critical links between indigenous and Spanish society.<sup>67</sup> But as important as they were to the creation of a hybrid colonial culture, these realms of mediation stand outside of the scope of this book. Problems with documentation also interfere with efforts to get at the intermediary work of indigenous women. Lisa Mary Sousa has commented on the lack of women’s testimony in Villa Alta legal documentation and posited that the

absence may be attributable to the long and arduous journey from most indigenous pueblos to the district court in Villa Alta. The distance may have discouraged women from providing testimony in civil and criminal suits, since long absences would have precluded them from fulfilling their household and productive duties.<sup>68</sup> Yet it is important to keep in mind that lack of documentation does not necessarily mean the absence of historical agency, or the lack of women in powerful mediating roles.

Although indigenous women intermediaries do not grace the pages of this book, I use the concept of gender as a signifying system in different moments in my analysis. In chapter 1, as I examine the construction of languages of negotiation that native and Spanish intermediary figures used in their struggles with one another, I consider “honor” and “Indian” as gendered colonial discourses that constituted part of a common meaningful framework for political and cultural negotiation. In analyzing the Lienzo of Tiltepec (a Zapotec pictorial narrative) in chapter 4, I explore the gendered dimensions of changes in Sierra Zapotec iconography concerning ruling pairs and legitimate authority. Finally, in chapter 6, which focuses on the mediating role of the sierra’s “Indian conquerors,” I incorporate an analysis of how the Indian conquerors used the discourse of “conquest” to “feminize” the indigenous people of the sierra while identifying the “indios conquistadores” as masculine warriors, thereby bolstering the latter’s claims to ethnic and cultural superiority over local “Indians.”

#### CHRONOLOGICAL AND THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

The Dominican missionary project and the repartimiento established the broad outlines of colonial society in the Sierra Norte and situated native intermediaries at the heart of the colonial project during the first century after the conquest. Yet the profound trauma for the indigenous population brought on by conquest and early colonialism—disease, death, and the disruption of the program of *congregación* (forced nucleation of settlements)—impeded the development of a fully functioning colonial system. This, combined with the Sierra Norte’s “peripheral” status, delayed the consolidation of colonial society in the sierra in comparison with the central regions of New Spain.<sup>69</sup> The dearth of Spaniards, the prolonged and late conquest, and the cultural autonomy afforded to native pueblos slowed the process of cultural change and the establishment of colonial institutions. In this regard, the Sierra Norte resembles other “peripheral”

mountain regions in New Spain, such as the Sierra of Puebla and the Sierra of Guerrero, which experienced a different historical trajectory from “central” regions.<sup>70</sup>

Recovery of the native population (it had reached its nadir in the 1620s at 20,751) began slowly in the 1630s, and provided a baseline for the emergence of a more integrated colonial society.<sup>71</sup> The year 1660 marked a turning point in this process. In the spring of 1660, when the native population was still dangerously diminished, and the demands of the repartimiento had increased substantially, native pueblos in districts throughout Oaxaca—Tehuantepec, Nexapa, Villa Alta, and Ixtepeji—rose up against their native governors and the local magistrates. The uprisings, which varied from a full-fledged rebellion in Tehuantepec to more disjointed skirmishes in the neighboring districts, arose from a combination of demographic, religious, and political causes. María de los Angeles Romero Frizzi posits that the rebellion represented a crisis in native religiosity, in which native pueblos could not maintain the cult of the saints because of the population crisis and the demands of the repartimiento.<sup>72</sup> Héctor Díaz-Polanco and his coauthors contend that the rebellion expressed a profound confrontation between an extractive political economy and a longstanding tradition of native autonomy.<sup>73</sup> According to Judith Zeitlin, in the case of Tehuantepec, the spark that ignited this tinderbox was a startling and “unsupportable” increase in repartimiento demands for cotton cloth implemented by the *alcalde mayor* of Tehuantepec, Juan de Avellán, and the “failure of the political institutions of the colonial state to restore an acceptable level of economic burden on the populace.”<sup>74</sup> Although these pressures were most acute in Tehuantepec, native peoples of other regions clearly felt them as well as they expressed their discontentment with their *alcaldes mayores*.

The historical arguments concerning the causes of the 1660 rebellion reinforce one another in their focus on the corrosive effects of the repartimiento on a central element of native collective identity: an indissoluble politico-religious autonomy. Native autonomy lay at the heart of the struggles between native intermediaries and Spaniards throughout the mid-late colonial period. The story that I tell in the pages that follow traces the period from the 1660 rebellion until the beginnings of the independence movement in 1810. In the district of Villa Alta, this century and a half was the most dynamic of the colonial era. The 1660 rebellion forced the

colonial administration to rethink its ruling strategy. From 1660–1810, through violent rebellion, legal conflict, and political negotiation, native intermediaries and their Spanish counterparts forged a late-flowering colonial society characterized by a growing interpenetration of colonial institutions and what I will call a native “shadow system.”

Part 1, “Conflict and Crisis, 1660–1700,” follows the careers of native noblemen who asserted themselves as itinerant merchants, legal agents, interpreters, native governors, and religious leaders in the context of the Spaniards’ efforts to consolidate their hold on the repartimiento and intensify the war against “idolatry.” Chapter 1 explores how in response to native resentment of Spanish civil and Church officials, native intermediaries resisted Spanish interference in native political and ritual life. Through their political and legal work—declarations of fealty to the Crown, mobilization of interethnic alliances, and deployment of the discourse of native autonomy—they opened space for electoral independence, intertribe integration, native trade, and native religiosity while enhancing their own power vis-à-vis the Spanish magistrate and parish priests.

Chapter 2 focuses on the Cajonos Rebellion of 1700 and its aftermath. The rebellion represented a violent native reaction to persistent Spanish interference in native affairs, and more pointedly to the violation of the principle of native autonomy. During the trial of the rebel leaders that followed the rebellion, Spanish officials and the cabildo officers of the Cajonos region struggled to impose their version of events. In the process, they produced divergent meanings of the rebellion, which shaped local politics in the half century that followed. The rebellion provided the Church and state with a pretext to impose a new colonial order and reminded both the Spaniards and the region’s native inhabitants in the starkest of terms of the relationships of power that undergirded colonialism.

Part 2, “The Renegotiation of Local Rule: Strategies and Tactics, 1700–1770,” examines the remaking of the local colonial order by native intermediaries, the bishop of Oaxaca, the local magistrates, and the Real Audiencia after the Cajonos Rebellion and in the wake of a native demographic boom. From 1702 to 1728, the bishop of Oaxaca, in partnership with the local magistrates, initiated policies of repression, extirpation, and administrative reform. These policies nearly doubled the parishes in the district and placed more parish priests on the ground. Chapter 3 traces how native intermediaries resisted parish reform through appeals to the Real Audiencia.

cia in which they deployed legal rhetorical strategies, such as bicultural (ladino) performance and “local custom” (*costumbre*). Chapter 4 focuses on how native intermediaries mediated the effects of a boom in the native population and an intensification of the repartimiento to create a growing interdependence between Spaniards and native people. As legal agents and cabildo officers, native intermediaries turned to the district court and creatively utilized the designations of *cacique* (nobleman) and *cacicazgo* (noble estate) to negotiate shifting relationships among native nobility and commoners and shape the outcome of interpueblo rivalries.

Part 3, “The Political Space Closes, 1770–1810,” examines how native intermediaries shaped the local impact of the Bourbon Reforms, and how Bourbon legislation affected their intermediary roles. The reforms, which began in earnest in 1763, represented a move toward state centralization and direct rule of Spain’s imperial holdings. Chapter 5 looks at how native intermediaries mitigated the combined effects of Bourbon economic and cultural reforms. The outlawing of the repartimiento and renewed state support for the mining industry converged with Bourbon hostility toward native languages and local custom to undercut the power of native cabildo officers. Chapter 6 examines how the “Indian conquerors” of Villa Alta—natives from central Mexico who helped the Spaniards to subdue the Zapotec, Mixe, and Chinantec peoples in the sixteenth century—resisted Bourbon efforts to eliminate their special privileges, including tribute exemption. In petitions to the court, the residents of Analco identified themselves as “Tlaxcalans” in an effort to link themselves with the most important native allies of Hernán Cortés. The courts ruled against them, and this moment marked a shift in their status from “Indian conquerors” to “local Indians.”

Despite the efforts of some native intermediaries to resist political centralization and the homogenization of indigenous identity, the net effect of the Bourbon Reforms was to constrict the intermediary space that independent-minded cabildo officers, priest’s assistants, legal agents, and the Indian conquerors had occupied. I suggest at the end of the book that by undercutting native intermediaries in their diversity of roles, the Bourbons weakened a lynchpin in the colonial system, and speeded the process of independence.