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Images and Landscape: The (Dis)ordering of Colonial Territory (Quito in the Eighteenth Century)

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Abstract: This article explores the role played by images of the Virgin Mary in the ordering of space during the colonial period, as well as in the disruption of such order as a gesture of resistance by subordinate groups. In the Real Audiencia de Quito of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, civil and religious authorities used miraculous images of the Virgin Mary as aids in the founding of *reducciones*, which assured the imposition of Christian civility upon the Native population. Legal records suggest that in the second half of the eighteenth century Indigenous communities deployed similar strategies as a means of asserting their own concerns. Native actors physically manipulated Marian images in times of conflict, moving them around or apprehending them either to legitimize their desertion of colonial settlements or to resist forced relocation. In both the early colonial period and in the eighteenth century, the key strategy of shaping sacred landscapes was implemented in both Andean and Christian traditions.

Keywords: miraculous images; *reducciones*; cult images; Quito; colonial archive; Christian geography; Marian shrines

1. Introduction

In *Compendiosa Relación de la Cristiandad*, published in 1773, Bernardo Recio provides a detailed account of shrines in different provinces of the Real Audiencia de Quito that housed miraculous images of Christ, the Virgin Mary and saints (Recio [1773] 1947, pp. 293–303).¹ Recio was likely familiar with Wilhelm von Gumpenberg's *Atlas Marianus*, of 1657, a catalog of Marian shrines worldwide, and with Francisco de Florencia's *Zodiaco Mariano*, a compilation of miraculous images of the Virgin Mary in New Spain, written in the seventeenth century and expanded decades later by Juan Antonio de Oviedo.² Recio, like Gumpenberg, Florencia and Oviedo, was a member of the Society of Jesus, an order interested in the mapping of religious devotions and emphasizing the connection between hagiography and topography.³ In fact, Recio portrays Quito as a “promised land” replete with many miraculous images that had likely been transported from the Old World by the hands of angels. More significantly, in Recio's account, just as in the *Atlas* and in the *Zodiaco Mariano*, miraculous images appear inextricably linked to the history of individual places and towns, and thereby their role in the shaping and ordering of colonial territory is recognized.

Within this framework, this article explores the role played by images of the Virgin Mary in the ordering of space during the colonial period, as well as in the disruption of such order by subordinate groups. In the real Audiencia de Quito, during the sixteenth

¹ Recio lived in Quito in the mid-eighteenth century and traveled extensively throughout the region, accompanying Bishop Juan Nieto Polo del Águila in his pastoral visits. Recio mentions five miraculous images of Christ, five Marian images in the city of Quito and six in other towns and pilgrimage shrines. With regard to saints, he only includes St. Hyacinth's shrine in Yaguachi, near Guayaquil.

² According to Jason Dyck (2019), the *Zodiaco Mariano* must be understood as a co-authored text. While originally written by Francisco de Florencia in the 1690s, Juan Antonio de Oviedo amplified and edited the work in the 1750s.

³ Jaime Cuadriello (2010) noted that the Marian atlas was a literary genre popularized by the Jesuits after the 16th century.

and seventeenth centuries, civil and religious authorities used miraculous images of the Virgin Mary, such as Our Lady of El Cisne and Our Lady of El Quinche, as aids in the founding of *reducciones*, settlements that assured the imposition of Christian civility upon the Indigenous population. Legal records suggest that in the second half of the eighteenth century, Indigenous communities put into practice similar strategies as a means of asserting their own concerns. Native actors physically manipulated Marian images in times of conflict, moving them around or apprehending them, either to legitimize their desertion of settlements or to resist forced relocation. In both the early colonial period and in the eighteenth century, the shaping of a Christian landscape that transformed and tamed Andean geography was at stake.

The study of Marian devotion in colonial Spanish America has attracted the work of numerous scholars. Many of such studies have noted the location of images of the Virgin Mary, and to a lesser extent of Christ, at the intersection between Christian and Indigenous beliefs, between institutional control and local religious practice, as well as between secular and sacred landscapes.⁴ Maya Stanfield-Mazzi (2013) discerned the importance of Marian images both in the imposition of Christianity in the Andes and in the reformulation of Catholicism by Indigenous people. Following the systematic destruction of non-Christian beliefs, practices and objects, religious statues were “inserted into the Andean landscape” in dialogue with local meanings. Devotion to these sculptures was later disseminated with the aid of paintings. Recognizing the agency of Indigenous artists and audience, Stanfield-Mazzi discussed the miraculous statues of Our Lady of Pomata and of Our Lord of the Earthquakes, ex-votos and dressed-statue paintings, and the way in which these images permitted new ways of envisioning the divine. In her discussion of the statue of Our Lady of Copacabana and its maker, the Indigenous artist Francisco Titu Yupanqui, Luisa Elena Alcalá (2010) also underscored the importance of miraculous images in the spread of Catholicism during the early decades of colonization. While Alonso Ramos Gavilán’s recounting of this story does adhere to conventional hagiographic formulae, Alcalá argued that it is innovative insofar as Titu Yupanqui’s work as a sculptor acquires validation through divine intervention. This narrative, she added, also reveals the prominent role played by Indigenous artists in the colonial Andes. Thus, Our Lady of Copacabana and Titu Yupanqui materialized the complex web of relationships that characterized early colonial culture, marked by the contradiction between assimilation and Indigenous agency.

Particularly relevant for this article is the work of William B. Taylor, Jaime Cuadriello and Jason Dyck. While Taylor (2010) amply studied well-established cults of the Virgins of Guadalupe and Remedios, he also examined other Marian devotions from the rural periphery, as well as lesser-known miraculous images of Christ. Moreover, inspection of archival documents permitted him to move beyond official narratives and into the devotional practices and experiences of the faithful. With regard to the second half of the eighteenth century, which is the focus of this study, he noted the contradiction between more forceful institutional control, on the one hand, and greater transgression and disobedience, on the other. Taylor (2016) also noted the connection between miraculous images, their shrines and local topography. Jaime Cuadriello (2010), in the meantime, argued that images claim territory, something that is evidenced in lands owned by confraternities that sponsored their devotions. More recently, Jason Dyck (2019) noted the connection between the *Zodiaco Mariano* and urban topography. Florencia and his co-authors, he argued, portrayed Mexico City as divided into quarters, each protected by a miraculous image of the Virgin Mary. In this way, the *Zodiaco* imagined a Christian geography that was built upon the quadripartite division of Tenochtitlan and thus made use of Indigenous conceptions of space.

In contrast to previous studies, which have focused on renowned miraculous images attracting innumerable pilgrims to their shrines, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico (Brading 2001; Cuadriello 1994; Stafford Poole 1995, 2006), Our Lady of Copacabana in Lake

⁴ This article focuses on Marian images. However, there were also various miraculous crosses and images of Christ that attracted devotees during the colonial period. Among them were the cross of Carabuco in Lake Titicaca, Our Lord of the Earthquakes in Cuzco and the “Cristos renovados” in Mexico. See for example Taylor (2010); Burdette (2016).

Titicaca (Alcalá 2010; MacCormack 1984; Salles-Reese 1997) or Our Lady of Chiquinquirá in New Granada (Cummins 1999; Cousins 2019), this study discusses the way in which ordinary, non-miraculous statues of the Virgin Mary were put to work by Indigenous actors in the rural periphery of the Real Audiencia de Quito, a region that has been ignored by historiography. Rather than analyzing devotional literature and ecclesiastical histories and following Taylor's seminal work, this article delves into non-official and local narratives, shaped and voiced by Indigenous actors in testimonies that are preserved in legal records. While institutional texts instruct the reader on proper and official ways of venerating images, legal documents permit an understanding of the innovative ways they have been put to work by the faithful. As will be shown, the archive reveals the way in which Marian images crystallized Indigenous communities' sense of identity in moments of conflict, contention or negotiation.

In the early colonial period, religious images were instrumental in the imposition of the Christian religion. Thus, they occupied an uncomfortable place at the intersection between forced acculturation and resistance or accommodation.⁵ In the eighteenth century, by contrast, sculptures and paintings were already bound to the history and identity of individual towns; because of this, they could easily act on behalf of Indigenous communities. Moreover, by this time, Indigenous actors, like other subordinate groups, had already acquired empirical knowledge of Spanish legal practice and had become active participants in a colonial lettered culture. I follow the groundbreaking work of Cummins and Rappaport (2012), and their expanded definition of literacy.⁶

According to Bianca Premo, an increasing number of people were using the courts to settle differences in the second half of the eighteenth century (2017). Notably, many of these cases were initiated by individuals who belonged to subordinate groups, whether women, Indigenous people or Black slaves. These people saw themselves as "juridical subjects", argued Premo, and as such they spoke about their rights, among them, the right to litigate (15).⁷ In the Real Audiencia de Quito, this trend is evidenced by the innumerable petitions and letters sent by Indigenous litigants to legal officers. The cases discussed in this article permit us to think of *caciques*, *indios* and *indias principales* as intellectuals, in the terms discussed by Gabriela Ramos and Yannakakis (2014). Their empirical (or pragmatic) knowledge of the law allowed them to actively participate in litigation while mobilizing their communities to action. Penned or transcribed by *protectores de naturales*—a name given to court officers appointed for the defense of Natives—or by specialized scribes who adjusted the oral accounts to prescribed formulae, legal documents permit us to recognize the voices, preoccupations and legal knowledge of Indigenous litigants. At times, however, religious and civil authorities dismissed such petitions, no matter how just or urgent were the demands contained in them. On such occasions, Indigenous actors were forced to take more forceful measures, putting into practice strategies previously deployed by colonial authorities. Religious images figure prominently in such contexts as the final recourse, once legal actions had failed.

2. Discussion

2.1. Miraculous Images in the Early Colonial Period: Shaping an "Ordered Landscape"

In the Christian tradition, apparitions of the Virgin Mary, the unexpected discovery of hidden images or miracles performed by Marian statues legitimized the founding of pilgrimage shrines or towns. In Spain, many of the apparitions were linked to the Reconquista. In this context, images that had been hidden during the Moorish occupation were discovered, typically by a young boy or a shepherd (Christian 1981a).⁸ In Spanish America, apparitions were usually witnessed by elderly Indians or children (Taylor 2010).

⁵ See for example: (Gruzinski 1994); (Taylor 2010). For the Andean region, see for example (Nair 2007).

⁶ See also: (Premo 2017).

⁷ Recently, a number of scholars have discussed the participation of Indigenous actors in colonial legal culture. See for example (Dueñas 2010); (Yannakakis 2014); (De la Puente Luna 2015), among others.

⁸ For a discussion about images and local religion in New Granada, see: (Acosta 2001).

More importantly, images and apparitions validated territorial ordering and control and were thus instrumental in the spiritual conquest of the New World. Indeed, such prodigies usually took place in remote places, surrounded by a violent and untamed nature. In narratives woven around miraculous images, social and cultural conditions appear inevitably tied to the environment, a gesture that could be described as “moral mapping” of the colonial territory.⁹ In such places, people were described as living in *behetría*, or barbarity, and thereby prone to idolatry and needing adequate places of worship. Thus, according to tradition, images were first revered in humble chapels, built with poor materials and lacking sacred objects for the celebration of the liturgy. It was only after the arrival of the statue or painting that physical and spiritual conditions improved.

In the colonial Andes, as noted by Michael Sallnow (1987), miraculous images and their shrines were instrumental in the “reconsecration” of landscape—that is, in the shaping of a Christian geography that replaced pagan places of worship. Writing about colonial experience in New Granada, María del Pilar Mejía (2006) affirmed that Marian shrines built in the periphery of Santafé also assured urban expansion and ecclesiastical control over the population living in the margins.¹⁰ In dialogue with these arguments, I contend that statues and their shrines worked effectively to impose Christian civility, or *policía*, on the Indigenous population. They did so by aiding in the establishment of *reducciones*, highly regulated Indigenous settlements, with carefully designed grid plans organized around a central square and a church (Cummins 2002). Dialoguing with pre-existing notions of a sacred topography, images were readily integrated into Indigenous communities.

As argued by Tamar Herzog (2018), the establishment of *reducciones* in the early colonial period did not necessarily imply that Indigenous peoples had not been previously living in settlements but that they still had not been fully Hispanicized. Pastoral writings from the early colonial period, as well as stories about miraculous images, emphasize the remoteness, desolation and difficult terrain of Indigenous settlements. Thus, Fray Pedro de la Peña, who became bishop of Quito in 1565, noted that, seeking refuge from their enemies, the Natives had settled in harsh, mountainous and hidden places (“tierras muy ásperas, montuosas y escondidas”). Likewise, in 1598, Bishop Luis López de Solís stated that oftentimes they fled from the *reducciones* and lived absconded in ravines (guaicos y quebradas) (de Solís [1598] 1998, p. 460). Decades later, in his *Itinerario para párrocos de indios*, Alonso de la Peña y Montenegro (1668) stated that Natives lived in mountains, ravines and deserts (Herzog 2018). As argued by Herzog, insistence on such terms (*montaña*, *guayco*, *quebrada*) did not have to do with an actual place or habitat but referred to a conceptual space, on the margins of Christian civility and, therefore, potentially threatening to colonial society. Concerns about the need to incorporate the Indigenous hinterland into an ordered landscape clearly reverberates in stories woven around miraculous images.

The connection between statues and their shrines, on the one hand, and the establishment of Hispanicized Andean towns, on the other, is evidenced in colonial accounts, an example of which is Fernando de Montesinos’ *Anales del Perú* ([1625] 1906). As its name suggests, the *Anales* presents a chronology of events, ordered year by year, that took place in the Andes from 1498 to 1642 (Figure 1). The account combines information provided by different sources, such as chronicles, colonial documents and oral testimonies that Montesinos, a native of Spain who arrived in Perú in 1628, had gathered during his extensive travels in the region. The author weaves political and religious history with local occurrences, such as stories of miraculous images and their shrines, among them Our Lord of Mompox, Our Lady of Macas and Our Lady of Cocharcas. In many instances, and just as Recio did a century later, he notes the connection between images and the surrounding landscape. While discussing Our Lady of Chiquiquirá, for example, he notes that the Virgin Mary had requested the building of a beautiful church, which would attract the visit of

⁹ See for example: (Kohn 2002).

¹⁰ An interesting discussion regarding the relationship between miraculous images and the ordering of urban space in early-modern Italy is found in: (Garnett and Rosser 2006).

devout pilgrims. The building of the shrine, he suggests, would finally tame the Andean tundra's rigorous weather ([1625] 1906, pp. 180).



Figure 1. Miraculous images and local churches in Quito in the colonial period (map created by author).

More telling is his account of the miraculous image of the Virgin of Copacabana. Like other colonial authors, he notes that Francisco Tito Yupanqui, described as an unskilled sculptor (“mal entallador”), had carved the miraculous statue. What is particularly interesting about the *Anales*, however, is Montesinos’ emphasis on the Virgin of Copacabana and its shrine in guaranteeing control of the Indigenous population. The origins of this devotion, he suggests, had to do with persuading the Natives against deserting their town. Thus, he notes that in Lake Titicaca, the crops were always in peril due to continuous frost. Unwilling to abandon their lands and hoping to improve poor weather conditions, the Natives decided to establish a religious confraternity in honor of the Purification of the Virgin ([1625] 1906, pp. 87–89). The Virgin Mary had brought them comfort and, as a result, residents remained in their town. A similar argument is made with regard to the miraculous image of Our Lady of El Cisne, which resided in a renowned pilgrimage shrine in the southern province of Loja, in the Real Audiencia de Quito. In this case, however, the author is more explicit in suggesting the role played by the image in the establishment of the *reducción*. According to the *Anales*, in 1597, a terrible famine had afflicted the Indigenous

community. Determined to flee from the Catholic religion, and not just searching for better lands to work, argues Montesinos, the Natives had tried to abandon their village. However, the Virgin Mary herself had prevented their running away. In an apparition to the *caciques* and *principales*, she had asked them to build a church in her honor. In retribution, she would make sure that their afflictions ceased ([1625] 1906, p. 132). Stressing the connection between the community's identity and the Marian image, Montesinos adds that the shrine was named after the town as Nuestra Señora del Cisne.

As noted by Sabine Hyland (2010) Fernando de Montesinos had arrived in the city of Quito at around 1642, where he had access to the writings of Bishop Luis López de Solís (1594–1605). His *Anales* may have been informed by López de Solís' own preoccupations with pastoral work. As bishop of Quito, and following the guidelines of the Councils of Trent and Lima, López de Solís worked to consolidate ecclesiastical institutions in Quito. Thus, he conducted two diocesan councils and an extensive pastoral visit of his bishopric (Albuja 1998, pp. 47–52). His efforts also addressed the regulation of the cult of images in terms of spatial ordering and control.

According to various colonial sources, for instance, the bishop himself had sponsored the cult to Our Lady of Guápulo. A miraculous statue, commissioned by a confraternity of Spanish merchants and made by the sculptor Diego de Robles, also a native of Spain, López de Solís played a significant role in the building and adornment of its pilgrimage shrine, located in the outskirts of Quito. With regard to other miraculous images, and in order to assure their proper veneration while maintaining institutional control of their cult, he ordered their relocation to proper and accessible shrines. This was particularly true in the case of images in the periphery, as were Our Lady of Sevilla del Oro (also known as the Virgin of the Macas) and Our Lady of Oyacachi.

Montesinos ([1625] 1906, pp. 114–16) himself speaks about Our Lady of Sevilla del Oro, an early colonial devotion that flourished in the eastern Province of Quijos. In this remote town, on the rim of the jungle, the faithful had built a shrine in honor of the Immaculate Conception. Lacking an adequate image for the chapel, a devout man by the name of Juan de Gavilanes had found an old print, ripped and smoke-stained, which he placed on the altar. Once enshrined, the print of the Immaculate Conception started to glow with bright and vivid colors (“colores tan vivos y encendidos”). According to one of the witnesses, the more she looked at the image, the more beautiful it appeared to her sight, as if a veil had been lifted from over her eyes. Once López de Solís received news of this miracle, he decided to take the image to the town of Riobamba, placing it in the recently founded convent of the Immaculate Conception. According to Montesinos, both Gavilanes and the bishop were concerned with assuring proper veneration for the print. Notwithstanding, he also acknowledges the opposition to the bishop's decision by residents of Sevilla del Oro.

In his account of the Province of Quijos, Fernández Ruiz de Castro (1989, pp. 410–11) provided a different and more telling account of this translation, noting the conflict between the bishop and the faithful. Suggesting the divine origin of the print's restoration, Fernández Ruiz affirmed that human brushes could not have painted its bright colors. Despite the difficulty of the roads leading to the shrine, he noted, many pilgrims came to Sevilla del Oro, attracted by the image's miraculous power. More importantly, he stated that Bishop López de Solís had asked a clergyman to steal the image. The print was first taken to Quito, where a solemn procession was organized in its honor, and then to the newly founded nunnery in Riobamba. Unable to recover the image, Gavilanes had initiated a legal process before the judges of the Real Audiencia and in the ecclesiastic court in Lima.

Particularly interesting is the case of Our Lady of El Quinche, one of the most important miraculous images in colonial Quito. An early seventeenth-century account relates the origins of this miraculous image in the moorlands separating the Andean highlands from the jungle of the Amazon basin and later forcibly relocated to what was believed to be a more suitable site (Manuscrito [1640] 1932). Plagued with contradictions, the narrative suggests an opposition between the agency of the faithful and institutional control.

This account affirms that the statue was made by Diego de Robles, who (as already noted) was also the sculptor of the Virgin of Guápulo, as has already been noted. Robles himself had taken it to the Indian town of Oyacachi. He had placed the statue in the village's humble chapel, adorning its altar as much as he could, with textiles woven by Indigenous residents. The first miracle performed by the Virgin was in favor of the sculptor himself, who almost lost his life on the perilous trip to Quito. Many other miracles followed, the image's power attracting the visit of innumerable pilgrims. Interestingly, the narrative also notes the importance of the image in instilling *policía* amongst the Indigenous population. Thus, in order to guarantee an adequate place for the cult, efforts were made to embellish the humble shrine with donations from the faithful. More importantly, after the arrival of the image, Natives began gathering in the chapel as its bells summoned the faithful for the study of Christian doctrine ([Manuscrito \[1640\] 1932](#), p. 393). Notwithstanding the benefits the miraculous statue may have offered to Oyacachi, and against the Natives' will, the bishop had the image removed from its chapel and taken to El Quinche, a town situated in the immediate periphery of Quito, where it still resides.

The bishop's decision may have been a response to persistent idolatrous practices in Oyacachi, which seemed to pollute Christian veneration to the image. Indeed, during the feast organized by the Indigenous governor to celebrate the construction of his new house, drunken Natives had placed a bear's head on an altar and presented it with offerings ([Manuscrito \[1640\] 1932](#), p. 451). However, removal of the statue may have also had to do with López de Solís' concern with the ordering of colonial territory.

According to the cited account, before the Spanish conquest, northern Andeans fleeing from the cruelty of the Incas had founded the town of Oyacachi. In this remote and inhospitable site, it is noted, they remained for many years in complete isolation, distanced from other towns by rugged mountains and the Andean tundra. The village did not have its own clergy, and due to poor weather and a lack of adequate roads, a traveling priest (*cura beneficiado*) visited only twice a year. The Natives, it is argued, had become one with the misery and sterility of the land ("están connaturalizados con esta miseria y esterilidad") ([Manuscrito \[1640\] 1932](#), p. 321). It is also noted that attempts had been made to relocate the town to a more suitable place ("reducir o poblar en un lugar más adecuado"), but its residents had consistently refused to do so ([Manuscrito \[1640\] 1932](#), p. 392). With this preoccupation in mind, religious authorities may have expected them to follow their miraculous image to its new location. Thus, the statue of the Virgin Mary may have operated as a forceful, yet ultimately ineffective, instrument in organizing the people of Oyacachi into an "ordered settlement".

In his seminal studies on religion in early modern Spain, and emphasizing the distinction between prescription and practice, [Christian \(1981b\)](#) noted the connection between miraculous images and local history and identity. Thus, in Europe and in Spanish America, Marian statues frequently took the names of the towns where they happened to be located, and their original titles were gradually effaced. The shrines themselves, adorned with ex-voto paintings and other offerings brought by the devout, expressed people's faith and devotion, as opposed to Church authority. Christian's argument is useful in understanding the tension inherent to narratives woven around apparitions and miraculous images in Spanish America, or the contradiction between institutional control and the agency of the faithful. This is true even in official narratives, as is the case of Montesinos' *Anales*. It is also notable that the importance of images during the early colonial period in the shaping of a Christian geography, control of territory and the founding of "orderly" towns ceased to be an exclusively official strategy, as it was eventually put into practice by subordinate groups. This is clear in the case of Our Lady of El Cisne where, as noted, Montesinos' account suggests a connection between the miraculous statue and the concentration of dispersed populations into a *reducción*. A slightly different story, one that accords more agency to the Indigenous town, is told a few decades later.

Fray de Diego de Córdova y Salinas' *Crónica Franciscana*, of 1648, describes the three most important Franciscan devotions to the Virgin Mary in the Real Audiencia de Quito.

These were a painting of Our Lady of Montserrat, in the Recoleta of San Diego, in Quito, and two miraculous images from the Corregimiento de Loja. In the mining town of Zaruma, the image of Our Lady of the Consolation, which adorned an altar in the Franciscan monastery, had performed innumerable miracles in favor of people working in the gold mines. Regarding the Virgin of El Cisne, he transcribes the written testimony provided by Fray Joseph Lucero, vicar of this village. Speaking about the origins of this devotion, he notes that the statue had been brought from Quito to El Cisne, where it was placed in a small chapel. Lucero also addresses the importance of the image in the shaping of an ordered geography. In this case, however, the miraculous statue may have permitted the residents of El Cisne to resist forced relocation. According to this testimony, since there were very few residents living in El Cisne, civil authorities ordered that they be resettled in the neighboring town of Chuquiribamba. Forcing them to abandon their lands, the authorities burnt down their houses (“mandó les quemassen los ranchos en que vivían y se redujessen al pueblo de San Juan de Chucubamba [sic]”). In compliance with the order, the displaced Natives carried the statue of the Virgin Mary with them as they marched to Chuquiribamba. As they arrived, a storm broke out, which was interpreted by locals as a bad omen, brought about by the newcomers and their image. Unable to settle in Chuquiribamba, the displaced Natives returned to El Cisne, whereupon the storm immediately ceased (“Y visto esto por los indios de San Juan de Chucubamba [sic], dijeron a los del Cisne que se llevasen a su imagen otra vez a su pueblo, que era muy gran tempestad la que veían; con que al punto que torcieron con la imagen, segó la tempestad”) (de Córdova y Salinas [1648] 1957, p. 1056). Emphasizing the miraculous power of Our Lady of El Cisne, this story offers a glimpse of the violence inherent in the shaping of an ordered geography. However, it also foreshadows the eventual strategic deployment of images by subordinate groups in pursuit of their own interests. This narrative, too, opens the door to disputations that would take place in the eighteenth century, in which Indigenous communities would clash with civil and religious authorities, and in which Marian images would play a significant role.

2.2. Subverting the Colonial Landscape: Images in Pueblos de Indios (Eighteenth Century)

The role attributed to miraculous images in the shaping of an orderly and Christian territory, as described by early colonial accounts, is also present in eighteenth-century narratives. An example of this is the story of Our Lady of Las Lajas, a miraculous image found near the town of Ipiales, near the southern border of present-day Colombia. *Maravillas de la Naturaleza*, written by the Franciscan friar Juan de Santa Gertrudis, provides an account of this image that is remarkably similar to that of Our Lady of El Quinche (de Santa Gertrudis [1767] 1956, p. 58). Fleeing from the violent uprising in the town of Pasto, an Indigenous community had settled in a remote location, where they lived in isolation for many years. Consequently, they had remained as heathens and were understood to have been deceived by the devil. It was precisely in this remote location that the Virgin Mary had decided to manifest her presence, which had become an important pilgrimage site by the time of the friar’s visit. The once idolatrous Natives, notes the Franciscan author, had been converted and incorporated into Christian civility. Painted on a stone slab, in the interior of a cave, the miraculous image is one with nature and yet seems to tame what Santa Gertrudis describes as a frightful landscape. The shrine was located on a cliff of dangling stone slabs that looked as if they were about to collapse, he notices.

A canvas painted in late eighteenth-century Quito shows Our Lady of Las Lajas standing on a richly decorated altar, being crowned by the Holy Trinity (Figure 2). St. Dominic and St. Francis appear behind the altar, in devout contemplation of the image. In the background is the rocky landscape described by Santa Gertrudis. At the bottom, on the left, is the cavernous shrine where the miraculous apparition took place. On the right, pilgrims from all walks of life descend the mountainous and rugged road that leads to the shrine. According to the inscription, Pedro Carrasco, bishop of Quito, granted indulgences to anyone who prayed to this image, which suggests his interest in promoting this devotion.

Like the acheiropoetic image, other replicas show Our Lady of Las Lajas painted on the polished surface of stone slabs.¹¹ The materiality of such copies is a continuous reminder of the origins of this devotion, as well as the once untamed landscape, now Christianized by the Virgin's presence (Figure 3).



Figure 2. Our Lady of Las Lajas; oil on canvas; 1790; Convento de la Concepción, Quito (Photo: Christoph Hirtz, with permission).

Along with the shaping of a Christian landscape, shrines assured the adequate veneration of miraculous images. As noted by Taylor (2010), this concern grew stronger during the second half of the eighteenth century, when authorities started to regulate more forcefully the worship of images, particularly with regard to processions and public displays. Nevertheless, it is likely that institutional control was stronger over miraculous statues and paintings than over ordinary images from the rural parishes. This is suggested by legal documents from the Real Audiencia de Quito and the use of Marian images by different

¹¹ According to Santa Gertrudis (63), it was an image of the Immaculate Conception, not Our Lady of the Rosary.

actors, particularly Indigenous communities, in ways that countered official regulations. As will be seen, unregulated movement of statues came to serve as a form of protest. Taking the images to the *montaña*, as Indigenous men and women deserted their towns, was a powerful and symbolic gesture that, at first glance, would seem to contest Christian *policía* and, by extension, its orderly geography. However, in their testimonies, Churquiribamba residents present themselves as good Christians who operated within the law. Just as Our Lady of Las Lajas had tamed a wild landscape, other Marian images could serve to Christianize the lands beyond their towns and legitimize the resettlement of Indigenous populations.



Figure 3. Our Lady of Las Lajas; oil on stone, eighteenth century; Museo Fray Pedro Bedón; Quito (Photo: Cristoph Hirtz, with permission).

While hagiographic and devotional literature focuses on miraculous images and on religious prescription, information regarding the faithful's practices and beliefs, and their use of ordinary images, is found elsewhere. Legal records are particularly useful because they bring us closer to the concerns of individuals and communities.¹² With this in mind, in the following pages, I discuss various documents presented to judges in Quito during the second half of the eighteenth century. While some of them were written by court and church officials, in others we recognize the undiluted agency of members of Indigenous communities. Oftentimes, pages bear the signatures of caciques and *indios principales*,

¹² In this respect, see for example: (Taylor 2010).

both men and women. Also included are transcriptions of original documents that carry notarial signatures certifying their authenticity as faithful copies. These documents provide singular views of the relationship between religious images and the history and identity of Indigenous communities.

Many of these documents describe unusual and irreverent actions attributed to Indigenous communities. In three different instances, residents had stolen bells and sacred objects from parish churches. On other occasions, Natives removed religious images from their altars and had taken them from their churches. Religious and civil authorities described these actions as sacrilege and accused the culprits of insubordination. However, in well-thought replies to these accusations, Indigenous men and women explain that their actions were their response either to the abusive behavior of priests or the misappropriation of their lands by neighboring Spanish *hacendados*. It is important, in terms of background, that before taking matters into their own hands, these legally knowledgeable Indigenous communities had already presented lengthy written petitions to the civil courts and to the bishop of Quito. Removing the bells and images from parish churches was a final measure, only resorted to after substantial legal efforts had failed. What is particularly interesting about these cases is that, in the forceful removal of bells and of religious statues, the Natives merely resorted to customary practice. That is, they appropriated strategies that, as we have seen, colonial authorities had long employed in the shaping of an ordered, Christian geography, for their own benefit.

In 1756, Juan Nieto Polo del Águila, bishop of Quito, wrote a letter to the judges of the Real Audiencia, in which he denounced the insubordination of the Indigenous town of Sosoranga, in the Corregimiento de Loja. Previously, the members of this community had presented a formal complaint against Fray Ignacio Castro, the parish priest, for his continuous abuse. However, the bishop had dismissed these charges, arguing that Castro had adequately carried out his pastoral duties. Polo del Águila also stated that the Natives had committed the crime of sacrilege when they removed the bells from the parish church, hampering due cult and reverence to God and the saints. Without bells to summon the faithful, these actions had also impeded the celebration of mass, evangelical preaching and the teaching of Christian doctrine (ANH/Q, Religiosos, Caja 24, Exp. 1, 1756).¹³ One of the judges in Quito found that Sosoranga residents had unlawfully sought to remove Castro from office and appoint their own priest and added that the bells had been taken to the mountains, where the Natives had remained for a few days, to show their discontent (“las campanas que se llevaron a los montes a donde se pasaron, manteniéndose algunos días”) (ANH/Q Religiosos, Caja 24, Exp. 1, 1756, ff. 100–100v). According to both religious and civil authorities, Sosoranga’s rebelliousness had set a bad example in the region, triggering similar actions in neighboring towns. Indeed, soon after, residents of Chuquiribamba would also steal bells from their church, in a similar expression of indignation at their own parish priest’s abusive behavior.¹⁴ As the bishop persisted in dismissing their claims, the Natives resorted to even stronger measures. Thus, according to the priest, they had also removed two statues of the Virgin Mary from their altars.

Evidence suggests that stealing bells from parish churches as a form of protest was a strategy put into practice throughout the Real Audiencia de Quito. In 1761, for example, residents from Cumbal, in what is now Colombia, had also rebelled against an abusive parish priest, removing bells as well as sacred ornaments from the church (ACM/Q, Gobierno Eclesiástico, Caja 9, 1761, f. 1). Likewise, various sources address the practice of stealing images of the Virgin Mary. In 1787, the parish priest of the town of Quero, in the Corregimiento of Ambato, denounced the robbery of the image of Nuestra Señora

¹³ Bishop Juan Nieto Polo del Águila states that the Natives “cometieron la sacrilega acción de quitar las campanas de su propia autoridad pretendiendo destruir así la iglesia parroquial y quitar el culto y reverencia a Dios Nuestro Señor en ella y sus santos. Alzar la parroquia y las funciones de oír misa, oír la predicación evangélica y recibir el pasto espiritual de la doctrina cristiana” (3). According to Polo del Águila, the Natives had been instigated to commit these actions by civil authorities and local residents.

¹⁴ According to the parish priest, the bells are “lenguas con que N. Sta. Madre iglesia, convoca los fieles a la doctrina, misa, confesión” (ANH/Q, Serie Indígenas, Caja 70, Exp. 5 [1], 1757, f. 5).

del Monte from the main altar of the church. Although no details are provided as to the robbery's motivations, the priest affirms that it had violated the sacredness of the temple ("violando el sagrado respeto y veneración de la casa de Dios") (ACM/Q, Gobierno Eclesiástico, Caja 19, 1787, f. 1). Meanwhile, in a letter addressed to the Viceroy of New Granada, in 1768, the cacique of Colaysacapi, Don Casimiro Masa, notes that residents from the town of Changaimina had lost their community lands, and because of this they had taken the images and deserted their village (ANH/Q, Serie Indígenas, Caja 88, Exp. 10, 1768, f. 1).

Of these statues, only Nuestra Señora del Monte, from Quero, is still known for its miraculous power. As for the remaining statues, all of which adorned the altarpieces of parish churches, it is possible that these devotions were sponsored by local confraternities. As such, the images were inevitably linked to the identity and history of Indigenous towns. Thus, it comes as no surprise that they were used to give voice to the concerns of their own residents.

Legal documents produced in connection to these cases insist that there had been a purposeful disruption of the ordered landscape, previously shaped by the establishment of *reducciones*.¹⁵ In the testimonies of witnesses, in accusations written by civil and religious authorities, as well as in the petitions presented by the Natives themselves, we find references to desolate towns and to images and bells presumably taken to the mountains as the Natives fled from their villages. Civil and religious authorities address the matter in terms of insubordination, rebellion and sedition. Indigenous leaders, on the other hand, insisted their parish priests and neighboring Spanish *hacendados* had been abusive and blame them for disturbing the peace and tranquility of their communities and, by extension, of Christian *policía*.

In Cumbal, Indigenous residents had not only stolen the church bells. According to religious authorities, they had also threatened to leave town and settle in the mountains ("echaron la voz de que, desertando el pueblo, pasaban a retirarse a los montes") if the parish priest was not removed from his office (ACM/Q, Gobierno Eclesiástico, Caja 9, 1761, f. 1). On the written petition sent to the Viceroy of New Granada, the cacique of Colaysacapi denounced the abusive behavior of local authorities and *hacendados*, who continually subjected Indigenous residents to excessive tribute and forced labor. Speaking about the difficult situation of various Indigenous towns in the Corregimiento de Loja, he states, for example, that the village of Colambo had been deserted and destroyed ("desierto y destruido") because of the governor's actions. As for the village of Changaimina, which we mentioned above, the cacique states that its residents had left their homes, carrying their images to the mountains ("con sus imágenes a los cerros") (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 88, Exp. 10, 1768, fol. 1). More information is provided regarding the town of Chuquiribamba.

According to the parish priest, following their cacique's orders, Chuquiribamba residents had climbed the walls of the church and had stolen two images of the Virgin Mary. A group of townsmen took a small statue of the Immaculate Conception to Quito, where they had traveled to appear before the judges of the Real Audiencia. Meanwhile, the statue of the Purification of the Virgin, apparently of a larger size, was taken to the mountains ("la que tienen en el monte") (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 70, Exp. 5 [1], 1756, f. 5). Various witnesses who came forth to speak on behalf of the parish priest also argued that Tomás de Caraguay, *cacique* of Chuquiribamba, had instigated these actions, threatening town residents with burning down their houses and with physical punishment if they failed to follow his orders and desert the village (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 70, Exp. 5 [1], 1756, f. 6). Asked about the whereabouts of the statues, one witness affirmed that the statue of the Purification of the Virgin had been taken to the country (de la otra imagen sabe que la han llevado al campo y que la tiene Pedro Lanche) (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 70, Exp. 5 [1],

¹⁵ As noted by Edgardo Pérez Morales, these concepts continued to be employed in Quito and New Granada in the eighteenth century. See: (Pérez Morales 2006). While it does not mention the seizure of images as a contestation strategy, Marta Herrera Ángel's study of spatial and political control in eighteenth-century New Granada cited various cases of Caribbean settlements that were deserted after their Native residents had lost their lands or refused to pay tribute. See: (Herrera Ángel 2014, p. 69).

1756, f. 15). Another witness stated that he knew the statue had been taken, first, to a place known as Saracapa, not too distant from the village. However, traces left by the rebels, which he himself had followed, indicated that they, along with the image, had moved somewhere else (“solo viendo rastros que habían andado y se habían mudado, y no sabe a dónde paran”) (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 70, Exp. 5 [1], 1756, f. 111v). As will be seen, documents submitted by the Indigenous residents from Chuquiribamba note that they had, in fact, moved to a more remote location, beyond the jurisdiction of the Corregimiento de Loja.

In reply to the priest's accusations, Indigenous litigants presented well-reasoned arguments to authorities both in Loja and in Quito. Such petitions were written by different actors, among them Juan de Caraguay, cacique of Chuquirabamba, and Francisco Sánchez, *indio principal* from the neighboring town of El Cisne. Particularly interesting is a letter sent to the *protector de naturales* that was written collaboratively by five women from Chuquiribamba: Ventura Cuenca, Valeriana Caraguay, Tomasa Macuqui, Bernarda Lanchi and Victoria Masupi (ANH/Q, Serie Indígenas, Caja 70, Exp 5 [2], 1757, ff. 4–5). Finally, a letter presented by the *protector de naturales* to the judges in Quito was scribed by Indigenous leaders acting as representatives of the community, or “el común del pueblo” (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 69, Exp. 3, 1756, ff. 32–33). The documents denounce the violence and abuse of their priest while emphasizing his inadequacy to fulfill his pastoral obligations. Regarding the removal of church bells, Juan de Caraguay argued the residents had done this to persuade the bishop of the need to appoint a new priest (“nos retiramos de nuestro pueblo los más de los indios con nuestras familias y por mover más el ánimo de su Santidad Ilustrísima a que les quitase a dicho cura por más expresiva señal de los agravios que habíamos experimentado en nuestra ignorancia nos pareció conveniente quitar las campanas y llevárnolas”) (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 69, Exp. 3, 1756, f. 24v). The residents also note that leaving the village was not a voluntary action. Forced into exile by their priest's cruelty, they had to endure great discomfort due to the difficult terrain and harsh weather conditions of the *cerros* (“nos hallamos todos los naturales del pueblo de Chuquiribamba en lo más eminente de estos crespos cerros experimentando el indispensable hielo del tiempo, acompañados de nuestras familias, con toda la incomodidad”) (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 69, Exp. 3, 1756, f. 32v). To his allegations of physical and material hardship, Francisco Sánchez added lack of spiritual nourishment (“pasto espiritual”) and Christian teaching (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 70, Exp 13, 1757, f. 2). More importantly, in response to accusations of sacrilege, the Natives presented themselves as good Christians, emphasizing their piety and devotion to the sculpture. Having to flee from their village, destitute of all their possessions, they affirmed that the Marian image was their only source of solace and comfort (“nos retiramos del pueblo con la imagen de [N.M.] Santísima a estos montes a quien le lloramos el infeliz estado de nuestras miserias”) (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 69, Exp. 3, 1756, f. 32v).

Emphasizing the Natives' desertion of their villages and flight to the *montaña*, legal documents resort to notions of Christian civility guaranteed by *reducciones*, as a contrast to the wilderness and absence of spiritual nourishment that supposedly characterized the hinterland. Colonial authorities insisted on the Natives' insubordination, or resistance to colonial order, manifested in their seizure of things that belonged to the church. In the case of religious images, however, documents hinted at an additional peril, which was the lack of adequate conditions for their proper veneration. Indecency is a term employed by the parish priest and other witnesses to describe the way in which religious images were removed from their altars. Hiding in the mountains, the Natives could not guarantee an adequate place for worship, as was a chapel adorned with sacred objects. Indecency may have had to do, as well, with the indecorous transportation of the statue from one place to another, so markedly different from the solemn and orderly processions that normally celebrated the translation of religious images.

As has been noted, Chuquiribamba residents explained that abandoning their town was not a willful decision but that they were forced to do so because authorities had

failed to protect their rights. As such, they were not guilty of sedition. To justify their removal of statues, they repeatedly suggested the connection between images and collective experience. “Our mother”, the term used to designate the statues, and the community’s collective devotion indicate a shared practice. What is particularly interesting is that the Natives did not see the removal of statues from the church as a form of irreverence. On the contrary, it seems that in their understanding, Marian sculptures—regardless of their location—guaranteed their continued good standing under Christian law, so that this principle would hold even if the statues were seized and removed from their sanctuaries. Since practice granted religious images the ability to transform and domesticate landscape, imposing a sense of order upon the Andean topography, it is possible that residents from Chuquiribamba and Changaimina meant to use their statues to validate resettlement.¹⁶ In the case of Chuquiribamba, the Natives admitted that they and their image had moved from the neighboring Saracapa (where they had first stopped, according to witnesses) to the more distant Huancabamba, beyond the jurisdiction of the bishopric of Quito, where they could resettle their community. In the case of Changaymina, relocation may be explained by the Natives’ need to find new fields to cultivate, once their community lands were occupied by powerful neighbors.

2.3. *The Chapel and the Marian Image: Contesting Forced Relocation*

The connection between religious images and Indigenous communities not only permitted the legitimization of resettlement but served, as well, to resist forced relocation. In the second half of the eighteenth century, efforts were made to secularize *doctrinas*, the name given to proto-parishes for Indigenous communities. As its name suggests, this process involved the transfer of rural *doctrinas*, previously under the control of the religious orders, to the pastorship of secular priests. These actions were frequently accompanied by the reorganization of the colonial territory and consequently with the relocation of towns. This was the case for the Indigenous community of San Sebastián, in the province of Latacunga.

A watercolor map depicts the village of San Sebastián in the wake of the 1797 Riobamba earthquake (Figure 4). Commissioned by the *protector de naturales*, the legal representative of this Indian town, the painting was presented as evidence in a legal dispute that occupied the two moieties of this community. One of these moieties, described in colonial documents as residents of El Alto, had chosen to remain in the village. The opposite party, described by residents from El Alto as newcomers, had agreed to resettle in the urban parish of La Merced in the city of Latacunga pursuant to the orders of religious and civil authorities. In the new site, they had begun building a church and priest’s quarters.

Speaking on behalf of the resettled members of the community, the *protector de naturales*, his witnesses emphasized, as did the map itself, the inadequate conditions of the original site, also called Pueblo Viejo. The picture depicts a humble edifice, built with poor materials and covered with a thatched roof. Lacking a grid plan, a few small huts were dispersed throughout the mountainous landscape. As if it were a deserted town, the site appears empty, not just of people but of any sign of social interaction or presence. Inscribed on the unoccupied space, captions identify the place, further emphasizing the sense of absence or emptiness. In his opening statement, the solicitor indicated—as does the watercolor—that by the end of the eighteenth century, San Sebastián merely retained the title of town, the only thing that distinguished it from the surrounding countryside (“solo se distingue de campo con título de pueblo”) (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 145, Exp. 14, 1798, f. 2). No one was in charge of the village, he argued, except for a few dispersed Indigenous residents who lived distant from each other. He further noted that San Sebastián did not have a church but just an indecent chapel and a hut instead of a convent for the parish priest.

¹⁶ It is important to note, however, that these were temporary measures, and, therefore, these towns remain in place. Particularly in the case of Chuquiribamba, residents continued to litigate until the end of the colonial period.

In response to the solicitor's statement, the caciques and *indios principales* who had chosen to stay in San Sebastián presented a very different story.¹⁷ They affirmed that they did not just have an adequate church, adorned with sacred objects, but they also reminded authorities that, in the past, a priest had regularly taught Christian doctrine in the village. They also stated that they would not resettle in the urban parish because they did not want to abandon their homes and parcels. Disdainfully, they also questioned the suitability of the new site, which they described as a rocky terrain ("aquel sitio que con nombre de anejo y en un lajar se ha formado la capilla") (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 145, Exp. 14, 1798, f. 17). Importantly, the Natives also declared their desire to live in *policía*, which would only happen if their church and village were preserved. Thus, they argued that by having a church and a priest of their own, they would be able to remain *reducidos*, and would be able to carry on with their manual and pastoral labors ("teniendo iglesia propia, y cura deseamos reducirnos, y no andar dispersos, experimentando la mayor peregrinación y orfandad, sin atención a nuestras manufacturas y labores de campo") (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 145, Exp. 14, 1798, f. 18).



Figure 4. Map of San Sebastián, Latacunga; watercolor on paper; 1798; Archivo Nacional de Historia, Quito (Photo: by the author).

Not just local authorities but even the bishop of Quito and the President of the Real Audiencia de Quito, Luis Héctor, Baron of Carondelet, had a decided participation in the case. Indeed, Carondelet himself had ordered the destruction of the Natives' houses, in the hopes that this would compel them to accept resettlement (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 147, Exp. 20, 1800, f. 1), although the governor of Latacunga did state that these measures were probably insufficient since, in the past, residents of San Sebastián had responded violently to the presence of civil authorities (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 147, Exp. 20, 1800, ff. 3–3v). Because of this, and to guarantee the community's compliance with the president's decision, the governor requested the army's presence.

Regardless of the outcome of this case, it is worth examining specific circumstances to recognize the agency of the various participants in the context of local religious practice. For one, the existence of antagonistic moieties in San Sebastián, one of them, as noted, identified as El Alto, suggests that Andean conceptions of community—the complementary

¹⁷ This document is presented to authorities by the *protector de naturales* on behalf of Antonio Chásig, Francisco Pasmado, Atanasio Ninasunta, Xavier Zaragocín, Hilario Chicaiza, Marcos Zaragocín and Diego Jiménez "y más del común de indios de este asiento" (1).

opposites of *hanan* and *hurin*, upper and lower—were still present in the village. More importantly, at the center of the dispute was a statue of Our Lady of the Rosary, which may have served to articulate and resolve conflict between the two opposing groups. In this respect, it is interesting to see the way in which Natives from the two moieties put the statue to work in their favor, whether to guarantee resettlement or to resist relocation.

Former residents of San Sebastián who had willingly agreed to resettle in Latacunga, among them Don Pedro Tunitasig, governor and *principal*, and Don Agustín Taipe and Don Miguel Vela, *alcaldes ordinarios*, claimed that the image of the Virgin Mary was their aid in times of need, particularly during the drought season. Appealing to the concept of immemorial rights, they requested the statue's presence in the new church ("siendo costumbre inmemorial en este asiento y parroquia el que en las ruinas y otras calamidades, que diariamente se experimenta en esta jurisdicción, el auxiliarnos del auxilio, socorro y refugio de la portentosa Reina del Rosario de San Sebastián") (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 145, Exp. 13, 1798, ff. 62–62v). Meanwhile, El Alto residents who insisted on remaining in Pueblo Viejo only reluctantly accepted to take the image to the urban parish, but only momentarily, for the celebration of a *novena* they believed would bring rainfall to the region (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 145, Exp. 13, 1798, ff. 62–62v). Once the *novena* was over and challenging demands made by authorities, the Natives fled back to their village, taking the statue of the Virgin Mary with them (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 147, Exp. 20, 1800, ff. 5–5v).

Also appealing to tradition, El Alto residents presented a clear argument regarding the connection between the statue and the old settlement's history. In an early petition presented to their solicitor, the *principales* of San Sebastián stated that the old chapel had been rebuilt by their elders, who had wished to remain there ("compuesta por dichos nuestros mayores volvieron a quedar en ella"). Likewise, they noted that, since ancient times, the statue of Our Lady of the Rosary was worshipped as patron of the parish ("la santísima virgen del Rosario patrona de dicha parroquia quien desde la antigüedad ha sido venerada en ella"). More importantly, not only would the Natives be forced to leave their homes and lands, but the Virgin herself would be separated from confraternity lands that financed her cult ("tiene sus inmediatas tierras de cofradías") (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 145, Exp. 13, 1798, f. 4).

It is clear that the statue of the Virgin Mary was physically detained in El Alto as a strategy to resist relocation. Thus, acknowledging Carondelet's instructions, the *corregidor* of Latacunga stated that he would request that all sacred objects, as well as the Marian statue, be taken from the old chapel to the new edifice. As noted, the *corregidor* was preoccupied with the El Alto residents' unwillingness to comply with orders. However, his concern was not only with the possibility of a violent response but with the fact that the Natives opposed the image's travel to the new settlement ("los indios de la Antigua población siempre han resistido el que la imagen de María Santísima viaje a la nueva población") (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 147, Exp. 20, 1800, f. 3v). Carondelet himself expressed his astonishment at the Natives' defiant attitude and their resistance to attempts at translating the image to Latacunga ("no siendo verosímil que yendo el mismo cura a trasladar la Virgen María del sitio en que se halla al que está mandado, se atrevan los indios del Alto a insultarle") (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 147, Exp. 20, 1800, f. 5).

Only after two years had passed from the beginning of conflict was the *corregidor* of Latacunga finally able to persuade El Alto residents to agree to the transfer of the Marian statue, and of the liturgical objects, from the old chapel in San Sebastian to the urban parish in Latacunga. It is possible that the royal officer warned the residents of the possible intervention of armed soldiers to assure compliance with these orders, although he does stress the need to handle matters with utter care and prudence. To seal this agreement, the faithful escorted the statue of Our Lady of the Rosary in a solemn procession from San Sebastian to Latacunga. In the new church, the image was received with the adornment of lights and pious songs. According to the *corregidor*, despite their affliction, the Natives probably found solace in the magnificent celebration that accompanied this transfer (ANH/Q, Indígenas, Caja 147, Exp. 20, 1800, ff. 8–8v).

3. Conclusions

In this article, I discussed the way in which miraculous images of the Virgin Mary, such as Our Lady of El Cisne and Our Lady of El Quinche, were used by authorities as instruments in the ordering of colonial territory and as aids in the founding of *reducciones* or *pueblos de indios*. In this context, I noted, images became one with the landscape. Emphasis on the sacralization of topography, important not just for Catholicism but also for Andean ritual practice, allowed effective integration of images into Indigenous communities. Legal records indicate that by the second half of the eighteenth century, *pueblos de indios* were putting similar strategies into practice as a means of advancing their own concerns. As expert litigants, towns in different parts of the Real Audiencia de Quito used statues of the Virgin Mary either to legitimize the refounding of towns in new locations or to resist forceful relocation. Archival records suggest that rural and remote communities appropriated religious images in the service of contestation and resistance. Thus, documents reveal the way in which religious images crystallized the identity and history of Indigenous communities.

While this article is informed by existing scholarly literature on Marian devotion in Spanish America, it also presents a new approach to the subject. Rather than analyzing devotional literature or ecclesiastical histories, a close reading of legal documents permitted me to uncover the voice of Indigenous actors in the colonial period. Likewise, in contrast to other studies that focus on renowned miraculous images of the Virgin Mary, I chose to discuss ordinary statues from churches in the rural periphery. Because of their marginal location, these images may have escaped full ecclesiastical control, permitting local actors to put them to work outside of established regulations. While this particular study centered on archival work in Quito, it also suggests the importance of looking more closely into local archives, as well as a comparative analysis between the Real Audiencia de Quito and other Andean regions.

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