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# Bolívar's Total War. War, Politics, and Revolution in the Age of Independence

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## Bolívar's Total War. War, Politics, and Revolution in the Age of Independence

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La guerra total de Bolívar. Guerra, política y revolución en la era de la independencia

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**ABSTRACT.** This article proposes introducing the concept of total war into the study of Latin American Independence in the 1810s and 1820s. We argue that total war was not an exclusively North Atlantic phenomenon, but an experience that also manifested itself at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the Spanish Viceroyalty of New Granada. To prove it, we analyze the social militarization caused by the enlightened reforms of the eighteenth century, the impact of political revolution in the Atlantic world and the decisive role of religion in creating an enemy that should be exterminated. The article concludes by pointing out two topics that underline the uniqueness of total war in a region of Latin America: the spatial and temporal unity of different forms of regular and irregular warfare, and the fact that total war was not the consequence of state action, but the starting point for State-building.

**KEYWORDS:** independences; New Granada; politics; revolutions; war.

**RESUMEN.** Este artículo propone introducir el concepto de guerra total para estudiar la independencia de América Latina en las décadas de 1810 y 1820, pues se argumenta que la guerra total no fue un fenómeno exclusivamente noratlántico, sino una experiencia que también se manifestó a principios del siglo XIX en el Virreinato español de Nueva Granada. Para demostrarlo, se analiza la militarización social provocada por las reformas ilustradas del siglo XVIII, el impacto de la revolución política en el Atlántico y el papel de la religión en la creación de un enemigo que debía ser exterminado. Concluye señalando la coexistencia singular de diferentes formas de guerra regular e irregular en el periodo independentista, y subraya el hecho de que la guerra total no fue consecuencia de la acción estatal, sino el punto de partida para la construcción del Estado.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** guerra; independencias; Nueva Granada; política; revolución; siglo XIX

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## Introduction

Total war was not an exclusively North Atlantic phenomenon but an experience that also manifested itself at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the Spanish Viceroyalty of New Granada or *Costa Firme*, as it was commonly called<sup>1</sup>. The General Captaincy of Venezuela —an administrative division of the Viceroyalty that corresponds, with subtle variations, to the limits of the present-day Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela— was the epicenter of total war in the continent's south during the Independences. Better than any other territory, the Captaincy exemplified how a civil war caused by an imperial crisis became an unprecedented war of extermination<sup>2</sup>.

It is argued that the concept of total war can clarify the deep links established between war, political change, and popular mobilization and help us interpret Latin American history in new ways<sup>3</sup>. Chronologically, the total war phenomenon has enabled the study of broader historical patterns, allowing important conclusions to be highlighted. One crucial understanding is that the contemporary culture of war not only has antecedents in political and military factors that developed within the global conflicts of the twentieth century but also in the implementation of eighteenth-century policies inspired by the Enlightenment, aimed at strengthening the transatlantic empires. Although the traditional chronological framework for thinking about total war has been expanded, the spatial framework remains the same. New areas beyond the North Atlantic have not been included to complexify the concept and contrast it with other war experiences. This evidence justifies the subject of this exploratory paper, leading us to the main question: could the war of independence in the Viceroyalty of New Granada be interpreted as a total war?

To argue that total war occurred in New Granada at the beginning of the nineteenth century goes against a historiographical approach which states that total war took place only in Europe during the twentieth century. It is undeniable that, during the twentieth century, industrialization and technology led to an increase in new aerial and atomic weapons that had an unprecedented impact on combatants, civilians, and national borders (Hobsbawm, 2003). However, while technology and industrialization in the twentieth century announced an undeniable change in how war was conceived and waged,

- 1 The Viceroyalty of New Granada was a heterogeneous territory that included the Caribbean and Pacific coasts, the Isthmus of Panama, and part of the coasts of Central America. The Viceroyalty also included the plains in the valleys of the Arauca, Apure, and Orinoco Rivers; the impenetrable Amazonian rainforests; and the Andean geography in the hinterland.
- 2 Jean-Yves Guiomar and Pierre Serna wrote two texts that invite us to think of total war on a broader dimension: (Guiomar, 2004) and (Bell, 2007, as cited in Serna, 2008)
- 3 The concept of *total war* appeared for the first time in speeches and writings published in France and Germany in the first half of the twentieth century to characterize World War I. However, over the last twenty years, a considerable amount of scholarship has applied this concept to other conflicts. Cases as diverse as the Seven Years War (1756-1763), the War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870), and the American Civil War (1861-1865) have been interpreted as total wars. In other words, conflicts in which the line between combatants and non-combatants was blurred and social, economic, and political activities were marshaled to maintain the war effort (Bell, 2007).

both factors coincide with a previous pattern that did not arise during this period. In the cases of the French Vendée, the Napoleonic Wars, the Haitian and the Venezuelan independences, or the bloodiest battles of the American Civil War, there were no significant technological innovations in the way of fighting than in the eighteenth century (Bell et al., 2011; Chickering, 1999). Despite technology, in all these cases, more and more people went to war with firearms, swords, and other bladed weapons, producing a considerable increase in violence, atrocities, and victims (Rabinovich, 2018). Thus, it can be stated that the total war of the twentieth century was dependent on processes that began earlier, in particular, the long-term militarization of western societies.

Although the experience of total war surpassed national borders and cannot be attributed to a single nation, there is an organic affiliation between the French Revolution and other phenomena of totalization of war in the Atlantic. The genealogy of the *levée en masse* (mass uprising) and the *soldat-citoyen* (citizen-soldier) in the sources has shown the importance of 1789 as a juncture of diffusion of new political values on both the European and American continents. Indeed, the protagonists of the revolutions and the independences of Saint-Domingue and New Granada had to create a political legitimacy that went beyond the French experience. Thus, while the war of independence in the *Costa Firme* assumed a total dimension that paralleled what had happened previously in Haiti, it also exhibited its own unique characteristics hardly comparable with other war experiences in history. For that reason, more than thinking about a “European total war,” this study is an invitation to reconsider the modalities of the totalization of warfare in different parts of the Atlantic World, in particular in South America<sup>4</sup>.

Of course, war cannot be reduced to one man. However, it would be impossible to think about total war in *Costa Firme* without referring to Bolivar's political decisions and sketching a historical representation of independence with reference to his life. The young cadet of the Aragua Valleys was in constant contact with European military thought. During his stays in Spain and France, he discovered new ideas on tactics and strategy in the writings of the Comte of Guibert. He also kept the military treatises of Montecuccoli, Sigismondi, and Rapp in his personal library (Zapata, 2003; Falcón, 2009). However, to become the *Liberator*, the title granted to him by the city of Merida in 1813, Bolivar created something new in terms of political and military strategies. Despite his confessed

4 To argue that what happened in *Costa Firme* was total war is not entirely new. Some scholars, such as Adelman (2015), Hébrard (2016), Lynch (2006), and Capdevila (2007), have studied the military mobilization, the logics of exclusion and extermination of the enemy, or the emergence of multiethnic armies in Venezuela between 1813 and 1820, establishing that what happened there was total war. However, without citing this concept, others have pointed out that during this period, the General Captaincy of Venezuela was the theater of a brutal and intense popular war that put this part of America face to face with the possibility of its destruction. This article sustains that both positions are correct insofar as there cannot be a totalization of a conflict without broad popular participation. Latin American independence was a continental movement that included all the groups and all the social actors of the time. This massive process mobilized an ethnically and politically heterogeneous population, a fifteen-year war in which, as Spanish General Pablo Morillo (1826) recalled, “despite the victories of either side, the end seemed increasingly distant” (p. 2).

admiration of Washington and Napoleon, Bolívar was not in the process of imitating them. Unlike these two leaders, Bolívar allowed the different ethnic groups that made up colonial society to enter the army. This inclusion produced the unprecedented expansion of a cruel and terrible war for independence, the justice of which Bolívar never questioned. The acceptance of an equality criterion (imperfect, of course) in the army enabled the creation of the most effective military corps in South America during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Bolívar's multifaceted leadership in the service of independence, which included both successes and mistakes, was a key factor in its eventual achievement. These spheres of influence included his ability to control the indomitable cowboys of the Colombian and Venezuelan plains, the *llaneros*; his struggle with the white creole society to integrate mestizos, Indians, free Blacks, and freed Black slaves into the army; his friendship with the great Alexandre Pétion, first president of the Republic of Haiti; and his intelligence to analyze and focus the war effort on an idea of liberty and independence. These efforts were particularly difficult in a society that was violent and fragmented after the rupture of the imperial pact with Spain. Bolívar was confident in his own moral position and, in some cases, the only defender of his political ideas in a society that embraced modernity while simultaneously denying it.

To answer the main question, and based on the previous context, this article will explore how the enlightened reforms of the Spanish Empire in the second half of the eighteenth century and the war of independence provoked a social militarization in the *Costa Firme* (*Enlightened Reform, Independence and Social Militarization*). First, it will discuss the *creation* of multiracial armies, a phenomenon resulting from both the social militarization, started in the eighteenth century, and the revolutionary process that began with the Spanish imperial crisis of 1808 (*A multiracial levée en masse*). Then, it will examine how defenders of Spanish royal sovereignty and independence began to mobilize all ethnic groups and the impact of that general mobilization on the traditional social structure. It will explore how violence, atrocities, and victims increased in the Costa Firme, in particular, in the General Captaincy of Venezuela (*The Generalization of Violence*), highlighting how a religious register enabled the political and military mobilization (*Total War, between Religion and Politics*). Finally, two particular manifestations of the totalization of the war in the *Costa Firme* are suggested: on the one hand, the spatial and temporal unity of different forms of regular and irregular warfare; on the other, that total war was not the result of the state's construction, but its point of departure (*Total War as Plurality of Warfare*).

How does the breaking of a transatlantic imperial pact fragment a colonial society that later reunifies through the process of war? What were the specific manifestations of the totalization of war in Latin America in the early nineteenth century? To what extent can the Latin American Independences contribute to the general debate on total war, and how does total war contribute to a better understanding of the Independences? In many ways, the challenge for contemporary world historians is to move away from

the established conventions of past representations and suggest new paths (Colmenares, 2008, p. 23). This article has an exploratory character and thus does not present definitive conclusions; instead, it tries to re-examine some archival sources and a good deal of secondary literature to respond to this challenge by uniting different analysis perspectives, and proposing a new one.

## **Enlightened reform, independence, and social militarization**

The English and French threats were major reasons for initiating a series of profound changes in Spain during the eighteenth century. To regain an influential place in world politics and ensure the security of the empire, the Spanish Bourbons carried out a comprehensive reform of the state, which included fiscal, judicial, and military changes both in the metropole and all their overseas territories (Kuethe, 1978; Pietschmann, 1996, pp. 306-307). Similar to the power redistribution in the Iberian Peninsula or the Philippines, in the Americas, the reforms combined increased metropolitan control in sectors such as mining and decentralization in others, such as the organization of an efficient militia system (Montoya, 1987). In this first part of the article, the argument is that the Bourbon reforms made possible the dissemination of military knowledge to sectors of colonial society that had not received it in the Spanish Caribbean. Bolivar's personal trajectory is illustrative in this regard. This diffusion was the starting point of a social militarization process that favored the totalization of the war in the *Costa Firme* when the rupture between the American viceroalties and the Spanish metropole occurred in the early nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

### **A new military landscape**

The creation of the disciplined militias in 1762 was a first step that expressed the crown's new policy in the Spanish Caribbean.<sup>6</sup> This policy was reflected in the mandate that all able-bodied men should be trained in the use of arms and serve for some period under the command of professional soldiers. Unlike the old militias, they received modern weapons and equipment, wore uniforms, and organized themselves into battalions and standar-

5 The enlightened policies of the eighteenth century created the possibility of integrating new social groups into the armies, which, until then, had been reserved to a large extent for the aristocracy. Fidelity to the King and patriotism began to be expressed in defense of the empires, a general phenomenon in France, England, Prussia, and throughout Spain (including its overseas possessions). As a result, the growing interpenetration between the civil and military worlds had two important consequences: an increase in the number of men in arms and the spread of military values throughout society. These sociopolitical transformations are essential to understand how war was internalized in politics and everyday mentalities. The reasons that explain the totalization of war in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century societies were political more than economic or technological.

6 It was hoped that traumatic episodes, such as the English capture of the port of Havana that same year, would be avoided with the creation of the militias.

dized regiments (McFarlane, 2008). The main purpose of the militias was to provide well-trained reserve forces capable of defending the American territories in case of attack<sup>7</sup>.

The uprising of the militias did not have the same results throughout the Viceroyalty of New Granada. The privileged regions to implement the system were the coastal provinces and the forts of Cartagena, Portobelo, Panama, Santa Marta, Maracaibo, Caracas, and Guayaquil, that is, the areas connected with the metropole that had been, or were expected to be, attacked by the English and the French. Another argument for implementing the system there was that, with the notable exception of Cartagena, the ports and main coastal cities suffered from a permanent shortage of fixed battalions and resources for their maintenance (money, weapons, and uniforms). Therefore, the militia system had to increase its defensive efficiency, search for new local sources of financing, and lighten its expenses.

The expansion of the militias in the Caribbean caused an Americanization of the army. During the second half of the eighteenth century, the number of Hispanic Americans serving as soldiers and officers increased. By 1800, 60% of the officers and 80% of the soldiers were born on the American continent (Marchena, 1983).<sup>8</sup> This trend both transformed the socio-racial composition of the troops and created a type of social equality in the militias. In the *Costa Firme* and other regions of the Caribbean, such as the General Captaincy of Yucatán, an increasing number of *morenos* (browns), mulattos, and certain groups of whites marginalized from the dominant strata of society began to access the militias to receive their first military education and, eventually, to continue in a military career (Bock, 2013; Falcón, 2003).<sup>9</sup>

While the Bourbon reform did not have the outcomes that the metropole expected in the fiscal administration of the *Costa Firme*, it had at least a significant impact on the creation of a new military landscape, particularly in the General Captaincy of Venezuela. In 1767, Alejandro O'Reilly, a visible head of the military reform there, ordered that all militias should be organized by the "Regulations of militias of the Island of Cuba." He

7 As indicated by the Prosecutor of the Neogranadian court, Francisco Antonio Moreno y Escandón, the new system would also allow the authorities to reinforce the judicial and administrative control over the Viceroyalty of New Granada. One key reason was that the heads of these new entities could hold the criminals who acted locally accountable more easily and bring them to justice. The second reason was that "the militias would contribute to lifting the census of the inhabitants of the Kingdom, describing precisely their homes, occupations, wealth and ways of living" (Moreno & Escandón, 1989, pp. 252-253).

8 According to Juan Marchena's calculations, from 1740 to 1759, 68% of the soldiers were Americans. Meanwhile, from 1780 to 1800, that proportion increased to 80%. In the officer corps, there was still a relatively high proportion of European Spaniards, especially in the higher ranks. However, Creoles sought military commissions at this level for the prestige and possibilities of promotion that they could gain. In 1760, about 33% of army officers were Creoles; by 1800, that percentage had almost doubled to 60%.

9 The integration of non-white sectors of the population went against the principles of racial segregation upon which metropolitan power and colonial society had been built. The conflicts did not take long to appear. The white Creoles considered that their social status declined when they served in the same units with officers and soldiers who did not possess the *cleanness of blood* (blood purity). For the white Creoles, officers and soldiers of dubious origins were entering the militias and began to receive the same military ranks and enjoy an increasing social prestige in the cities, something unacceptable for them.

created different units to ensure the defense of the north of the country: three battalions of Pardo Infantry Militia in Caracas, the Valleys of Aragua and Valencia, two battalions of white Creoles (*blancos*) in Caracas and Valencia, and seven Free Companies (*compañías sueltas*<sup>10</sup>). Four years later, in 1771, he added seven infantry cavalry companies: two of whites, three of *mulattos*, and two of *morenos*. The Battalion of disciplined Militias of Whites of the Valleys of Aragua, where Bolivar received his first military education, was created in 1770 (Falcón, 2003).<sup>11</sup>

The American and French Revolutions increased the risk of war throughout the Atlantic world at the end of the eighteenth century. Building popular sovereignty as an alternative criterion to dynastic legitimacy created a threat to the entire world order that generated diplomatic crises and civil and international wars in the following decades. In the *Costa Firme*, the risk of war and the alteration of the patterns of social authority established by the Spanish monarchy had already begun when the French started their European expansion. The revolutionary movement in the Atlantic impacted the Spanish (and Brazilian) society, creating an unprecedented situation that would forever transform the destiny of the Iberian empires.

### The Hispanic local assemblies

It is helpful to remember that during the Peninsular War (1808-1810), a plurality of local assemblies was created throughout the empire to defend the rights of Fernando VII, the legitimate Spanish monarch, then a prisoner of the French in the Castle of Valençay<sup>12</sup>. After learning about the provisions of the regency council that established unequal representation between America and Peninsular Spain, some local assemblies of the New Granada and the River Plate opted to break with the metropole. These assemblies assumed ecclesiastical, legislative, and governmental functions previously held by the crown's

10 The *compañías sueltas* were groups of hunters on foot or on horseback destined to take care of the provincial borders and to assure the safety of the roads. According to a Spanish military ordinance of 1822, these bodies should be primarily formed by militiamen. However, we do not know anything about their socio-racial composition. (Proyecto de ordenanza para la milicia nacional local de la península e islas adyacentes, 1822).

11 The process of social militarization was particularly evident in Cartagena and Caracas. In these two cities, there was an increase in militias in public spaces, the possibility for civilians to enter the army more easily, and the metropolitan objective of defending the empire from attacks by its rivals. Despite the administrative and racial peculiarities that existed in the Caribbean, this process was part of a broader trend whereby more and more civilians were entering the army in England, France, and Prussia. The Hispanic Caribbean was an example of what was happening in the Atlantic, and it was not an isolated case.

12 The Abdications of Bayonne, on May 5, 1808, whereby the Spanish Crown passed from the Bourbons to Joseph Bonaparte, a brother of Napoleon, and the entry of the French troops into the Iberian Peninsula represented the first international threat to the Spanish monarchy after the application of the Bourbon reforms in the military field. The reaction against the French usurper was unanimous throughout the Spanish Empire. The kingdoms, provinces, and all other bodies that formed the Spanish monarchy discovered their unity in opposition to this external enemy (Guerra, 1992, p. 38). The *Costa Firme* was not ready to wage war against an international power, but it was prepared to resist any tentative maritime attack or land invasion by the Napoleonic armies, a possibility considered in Caracas, Cartagena, and Santa Marta due to their proximity with Martinique and Guadeloupe. Several books study the decade of 1810 in the *Costa Firme*, among which Hébrard (1996), Thibaud (2006), and Gutierrez (2010) can be mentioned.



officials in a first step to reaffirm independent sovereignty toward Spain. The first obligation of the local assemblies in America was to ensure the security of the inhabitants and observance of the law (Acts of the Electoral and Constituent College of Cundinamarca, 1811, Art. 1, Title IX, as edited in Gutierrez, 2010, pp. 54-55). It was necessary to establish armed forces at the service of the new powers to achieve these objectives. In Santa Fe, in a register very similar to the United States and revolutionary France, it was understood that the defense of the fatherland should rest with the citizens. According to the Acts of the Electoral and Constituent College of Cundinamarca:

every citizen is a born soldier of the homeland when he is capable of carrying arms, without distinction of class, status, or condition, and no one can be exempted from military service in the grave circumstances of the state when the country is in danger. (Art. 2, Title IX)

In the local assemblies, the break with the metropole and the expansion of Atlantic republicanism between 1808 and 1810 produced the novel citizen-soldier paradigm. However, if we consider other factors developed in the eighteenth century, such as the expression of fidelity to the King through military service or the reorganization of the militia system in the Hispanic Caribbean, the citizen-soldier of the independence period maintains a certain continuity with the vassal soldier of enlightened reformism.<sup>13</sup>

Bolívar's personal path is important to understanding both the breakdown of the imperial pact and the continuities between Spanish reformism and the creation of the republican armies. As a cadet in one of the militia battalions created by the reforms, Bolívar learned the principles of military tactics and strategy. There, he read a military treatise for the first time, performed positioning and direction of infantry corps exercises, learned to handle a rifle, perfected his shot, and served with other recruits who were not in his social position and did not enjoy the privileges of inheriting pure blood (Falcón, 2003; Bushnell, 2007, p. 25). On his first trip to the peninsula, the young cadet first diagnosed Spain's difficult relations with England and France in the Caribbean (Bolívar to Palacios, 1799 as cited in Lecuna et al., 1929, pp. 4-5). Under the care of Marquez de Ustariz, another Venezuelan and, then, Minister of the Council of War in Madrid, Bolívar continued his military training along with history, dance, fencing, French, and mathematics classes from 1799 onward. Upon his return to Venezuela, he served in the same battalion. However, after the creation of the Caracas Assembly, his life would take a different direction. Bolívar offered his services to seek contacts with England to the new power. The Assembly promoted him from captain to lieutenant colonel in the militia infantry (Lynch, 2006), an appointment not directly sanctioned by the royal authority

13 A strong argument is that in several cities of New Granada, the new soldiers continued to train with the militia regulations of the island of Cuba for several years.

but not unknown either. In the Local Assembly, the vassal-soldier of the Empire began his conversion into the citizen-soldier of the republic.

### **A multiracial *levée en masse***

Between 1810 and 1812, the Viceroyalty of New Granada endured a civil war whose magnitude and violence continued to increase in the following years. The war rapidly ceased to be a confrontation between elites hoping to destroy the imperial pact and elites wanting to maintain it; instead, it spread to other social and ethnic groups of colonial society. To be total, the war had to become popular and mobilize not just the white elites but also the other racial groups in the combat field; this was what happened from 1812 onward.

The appearance of multiracial units facing each other in a single combat theater was a unique phenomenon that transpired in the *Costa Firme* during the war of independence.<sup>14</sup> The entire history of the war and the formation of patriotic armies could be understood from this point of view. This Latin American singularity is one of the most suggestive elements to understand any totalization of a conflict in the region. It constitutes the first manifestation of a pattern of recruitment that would repeat itself throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> In the *Costa Firme*, during the Independences, the adjective *total* also meant *interracial*.

To explain the emergence of a multiracial *levée en masse* that integrated whites, mestizos, mulattos, indigenous, free Blacks, and slaves within the same units, it must be understood that the revolution acted as a synthesis of processes that took place across different temporalities. In the eighteenth century, the reform of the militia system had created a dynamic of integration that had permitted the entry of non-white groups (particularly brown ones) into the military establishment. The visibility and social importance of these groups were becoming increasingly important, despite the existing specific limitations, such as the impediment to access to higher military command. Added to this previous dynamic was the revolutionary situation of 1790, whose discourse on equality was reinterpreted in the revolutionary experiences of France and Santo Domingo. What had previously been obtained, thanks to royal favor in the Caribbean, was now demanded as a right of the people. The rupture between the Spanish metropole and the American local assemblies that began in 1810 was the decisive moment that synthesized in the same political space the enlightened military reform, the independence wishes of the Creole

14 An antecedent of the creation of multiracial units took place during the Revolt of the Comuneros (1781). José Antonio Galán, a poor mestizo who played an exemplary role in the insurrection, created small and ephemeral units of mestizos, indigenous and freed black slaves, but failed to count on the support of the Creoles in the central region of New Granada. Galán was quickly captured, put on trial, and sentenced to death (Phelan, 1978, pp. 189-200).

15 Other examples of multiracial units are found in the American Civil War (1861-65), in the Paraguayan War (1864-1870), and in the succession of wars that led to Cuban independence (1868-1878; 1879-1880; 1895-1898).

elites, and the demands of marginal ethnic groups, who demanded greater rights by virtue of their participation in the war effort.

The emergence of these multiracial units is crucial to this understanding, both from the Independences' perspective and the totalization of the conflict, as they represent one of the hallmarks of the construction of political modernity in the *Costa Firme*. Moreover, a pattern of segregation within the Spanish imperial society was being broken, and, simultaneously, a tangible (albeit imperfect) criterion of citizenship was being built as a way to bring a highly racially hierarchical society together during a war.<sup>16</sup>

### The Haitian precedent

The Haitian revolution embodied an essential precedent throughout the Atlantic world.<sup>17</sup> Haiti stands out for the radicality with which social change occurred. There, for the first time, Black and mulatto armies were formed to defend a republican government, a previously unknown pattern of emancipation that spread later throughout the Caribbean. While inspiring the abolitionist debates in the United States and Europe, the Saint-Domingue revolution challenged a Western military culture in which honor and courage were mainly reserved for a white aristocracy of European origin.

The Haitian experience was decisive for both royalists and patriots of New Granada; however, they each interpreted it differently. For the royalists, the Saint-Domingue revolution demonstrated racial tensions' war potential to mobilize the most marginal groups of colonial society against their elites, a powerful weapon that could be used to regain Spanish control over the Caribbean. For some sectors of the patriotic elites, Haiti became a kind of alternative model to France, especially after Napoleon reestablished slavery in 1802, demonstrating the inapplicability of the revolutionary discourse produced in Europe to the Caribbean and South American context (*Loi relative à la traite des Noirs et au régime des colonies*, 1802). Haiti represented the possibility of bringing the political and social revolution to its maximum height by demonstrating that the emancipation of the republican model could redeem even the slaves. However, both realists and patriots saw the revolution and the independence of the Black republic as an uprising that could end up eliminating any kind of socio-racial hierarchy, which could ultimately damage the social pre-eminence of the Peninsular and the Hispanic American elites.

16 The military mobilization included ethnic groups that, until then, had not actively participated in the political field in practically the entire southern part of the continent. However, the breadth and density of the inter-ethnic recruitment that took place on the *Costa Firme* are incomparable to those in other parts of Hispanic America (Rabinovich, 2018).

17 Haiti became the epicenter of several processes: firstly, it inspired the abolitionist debates of the time in Europe and the United States, as well as the abolitionist revolts that proclaimed equality between whites, blacks, and free people of color in Coro (1795), Maracaibo (1799), and Salvador de Bahía (1798) (Gómez, 2013).

## A new pattern of recruitment

The royalists Juan Domingo de Monteverde and José Tomás Boves were the first to mobilize the *castas* (castes), the Indians, and the slaves massively to transform them into functional militias. This was a coherent choice for Monteverde and Boves, consistent with the dynamics of different ethnic groups' inclusion in the army created by the militia system. The fact that the royalists resorted to these groups' recruitment created an asymmetry between their forces and the patriots' forces, which held the latter's project in check until 1816.

Monteverde, a member of the Royal Navy with previous experience and training in the fight against Napoleon's troops, was the leader of the Spanish forces in Venezuela from 1812 to 1813. He established an alliance with the indigenous chief Juan de los Reyes, which allowed him to increase his troops to seven hundred men.<sup>18</sup> Monteverde aptly perceived the hatred of the local population against the Creoles and took advantage of it. A few months later, when he took Barquisimeto, he would integrate *pardos*, *zambos*, *mulattos*, and Canaries into his own forces. Commanding an ethnically heterogeneous force of troops, united in their rejection of the *Mantuano* elite (white Creoles of Caracas), Monteverde defeated Caracas, tumbling the First Venezuelan Republic (Bencomo, n.d.).<sup>19</sup> José Tomás Boves, one of the men under his command, continued to create royalist militias formed by *castas* to combat the Patriots.

Boves was a former member of the military and merchant navy, converted to trade after being tried for smuggling. He initially supported the patriots and requested to be included in their military ranks in 1810 (Pérez, n.d.). However, the Mantuanos rejected him based on his modest social origin, his unimpressive economic activities (retail, trade, and the capture of wild cattle), as well as his marriage to a mulatto woman.<sup>20</sup> Thus, under his charismatic command, Boves, with his combination of personal prestige and military talent, gathered cavalry contingents composed of mestizos, Blacks, and Indians skilled at handling spears, who defeated the patriots on various occasions. Boves argued that the lands of the whites should pass into the hands of the *pardos*, *mestizos*, and Indians in a register that even frightened the supporters of the King (Llamozas, 1815 cited in Lecuna, 1955). He was rumored to have 7,500 men under his command, of which only 60 to 80 were white soldiers and 40 to 45 were white Spanish or white Creole commanders (Llamozas).<sup>21</sup>

18 Figures on the number of men who joined Monteverde vary according to sources; some speak of 200 men and others 500. In any case, the possibility that Monteverde could advance in the Venezuelan hinterland after his arrival in Coro depended on the alliance with the Cacique de los Reyes (Borges, 1967).

19 Monteverde subsequently had to relinquish his command and return to Puerto Rico following a serious wound in combat in late 1813.

20 The patriots also destroyed his business and murdered his wife and son. Taken prisoner, he was later released by two royalist generals and integrated into the troops of Monteverde (Carrera, 1972, pp.22-24).

21 Boves was not alone. Other military leaders, such as José Antonio Yañez, also mobilized large numbers of *castas* in the plains of the Apure River, promising them lands and riches captured in the confrontation against the white Creoles in a war that combined mobile attacks, ambushes, and hit-and-run strategies.

Boves' political discourse, in which he justified the need to transfer the wealth from the Creole elites to the *castas* as the ethnic configuration of his own army, represented a major social transformation in the Captaincy. The dynamics of the conflict against the Creole aristocracy had for the first time formed social ties between ethnic groups that, until then, had been separated. Paradoxically, despite defending the King's authority and maintaining an obvious military advantage over the patriots, he was destroying the pillars of a society based on racial hierarchies (Thibaud, 2006). Mastering the recruitment of the marginal sectors of the Captaincy was effective in defending the royal sovereignty in the short term. However, in the medium term, it meant creating bonds of solidarity and cohesion among groups that could radically oppose the crown's power; this would occur later on.

Although president Hugo Chavez argued in 2012 that Boves' action demonstrated the class struggle in Venezuela, proving it is difficult.<sup>22</sup> Even more difficult is understanding the words, so full of affection, with which Pablo Morillo, heading Ferdinand VII's expeditionary army in an attempt to reconquer South America, described the thousands of "Indians, Blacks, and mestizos" in his memories who had received him as "brothers and members of the same nation" to defend the Spanish King in 1815 (Morillo, 1826). However, we must not lose sight that recruiting troops *in situ* without respecting the previous segregation canons of the Spanish society was necessary to continue the war in the *Costa Firme* (from either side). This implied integrating marginal social groups into the military sphere in the name of the King or the republic. Royalists and patriots faced a reality dominated by conflict, and it was this dynamic that plunged the various social and ethnic groups of the Viceroyalty into an entirely new reality.

### A necessary evil

The royalist side was the first to start recruiting *castas*, but it did not take long for the patriots to do the same (Conde, 2019). In 1812, Miranda decided to issue a decree whereby "he sought to recruit at least a thousand Black fighters, while sending emissaries to Haiti, with the mission to recruit three hundred more, preferably mulattoes." (Gómez, 2006, para.18). During the *Admirable Campaign*, Bolivar (1813) gave the order to recruit into the patriot ranks all the "people who not being in the military service have a disposition for it, being of whatever class or condition." (Lecuna, 1955, p.71)

However, distrust of the marginal sectors and the fear of losing social prominence based on whiteness explain why many of the patriot generals and Creole elites refused to enlist significant numbers of *castas* in the early years of the war. One of the most important legacies of eighteenth-century Iberian society was the widespread belief that the *castas* were cognitively inferior, a characteristic attributed to them due to their perceived "dissi-

22 Television statement on the 198<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle of La Victoria, 12 February 2012.

pation” and their “absence of discipline.” Metropolitan domination, and the regulation of the social authority of Creole elites during and after the war of independence, depended entirely on this postulate. The numerous complaints denouncing the integration of the descendants of Africans in the military ranks after 1762, and the refusal of the elites to integrate poor whites (such as Boves) or *castas*, were the expression of a continued monopoly of social power based on whiteness (Lynch, 2006). Additionally, the fears linked to the slave revolts that had taken place throughout the Caribbean and Brazil, in which slaves had murdered their former masters, were still present in the living memories of many.<sup>23</sup>

What forced the patriots to copy the royalists' strategy and generalize the recruitment of the *castas* in their ranks? It was a matter of necessity rather than principle. By the end of 1815, the campaign to restore the authority of Fernando VII in the Viceroyalty of New Granada (better known as the Reconquest) had exterminated many of the patriotic leaders and troops of Cartagena, Caracas, Santa Fé, Popayán, and Quito, or forced them into exile in the Antilles (Ocampo, 1989). For the patriots, it was clear that the only way to generate a constant flow of men to overcome the defeats, deaths, and desertions was to extend recruitment to all ethnic groups, just as the royalists had done. This was particularly visible in Morillo's troops, of which two-thirds were *castas* (Díaz, 1829).

Bolívar harbored many of the same fears and prejudices as other white Creoles towards mestizos, Indians, and Blacks. However, during his Caribbean exile, he understood that the reconstitution of the patriotic resistance would inevitably be linked to the abolition of slavery and the mobilization of poor whites, mestizos, and Indians. Regardless of the future conflicts that such a decision might cause among the generals or independence-sympathizing members of the elite, it was a necessary evil to continue the war to achieve independence. However, conceiving it was not enough; it was necessary to demonstrate to the marginal ethnic groups that the fight for independence could also benefit them. Despite the racial heterogeneity that existed within the Spanish troops, the possibility of military promotion for non-whites was virtually impossible. In fact, in his discourse, Morillo stated that espousing fraternity “between the members of the same family” that defended the King collapsed in the context of the military hierarchies. Hence, allowing the *castas* to advance in military promotion within the patriotic armies was a way to demonstrate a tangible benefit and rekindle the fight for independence. Bolívar was largely responsible for this policy.

The unfolding of the military promotion system within the patriots' armies was a gradual process built upon previous events. The process intensified after 1816 when Bolívar and his generals began the reconquest of the Venezuelan Coast with the moral

23 The insurrections in Santo Domingo and the slave revolts of Coro (1795), Maracaibo (1799), and Salvador de Bahía (1798) had caused panic among the white sectors of the Caribbean population.

support and military aid of Alexandre Pétion, president of the Republic of Haiti<sup>24</sup>. The army became one of the independence's central social actors and a mechanism for creating egalitarian and military citizenship, a space in which modern political principles such as meritocratic equality and social ascent reflected the political revolution that was taking place in Costa Firme (Conde, 2019)<sup>25</sup>.

After the Callos Campaign in 1816, intended by Bolívar and his generals to reactivate the rebellion against the royalists, the Captaincy's entire population began to mobilize regardless of ethnicity or social group affiliation, in a struggle with an uncertain outcome. The generalization of a multiracial *levée en masse*, extended to both sides, marked a new period in the war of independence. The daily life of combatants and non-combatants became fully organized according to the decisions of the military powers. Social life dominated by war included many palpable impacts, forced recruitment being the most dominant symptom. However, other factors included restrictions on civilian mobility in the city and countryside, mandatory tributes, expropriations, and abuses by poor and unpaid troops that were not always controlled by their superiors. These impingements on social life were common until the signing of the Trujillo armistice in 1820, which regulated the war and brought some peace to a territory devastated by ten years of war (Pita, 2019).

## The generalization of violence

Throughout Hispanic America, the war of independence was experienced as a period of unprecedented violence. Never before had such a degree of brutalization been experienced in terms of either intensity or spatial spectrum. However, this did not mean that war reached a *total* dimension everywhere. For instance, the Intendancy of Paraguay (a region of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata) declared its independence from Spain (and from Buenos Aires) without ever having experienced major battles. Others, such as the Audience of Guatemala, experienced some uprisings that were quickly abated.<sup>26</sup>

Only the Viceroyalty of New Granada endured a war of extermination and a situation of widespread psychological terror simultaneously.<sup>27</sup> The general Captaincy of

24 Cases like General José Antonio Páez, a mestizo and illiterate caudillo who later became president of Venezuela, and Admiral José Prudencia Padilla, a pardo who climbed the entire military hierarchy to become one of the naval heroes of the war, would not have been possible without the support of a promotion defended from above.

25 This, despite the counterarguments of various historians who have sought to minimize the importance of the military groups and what they meant for independence and for the future of Colombia, the nation that emerged in 1821 and disappeared in 1831.

26 The historiography of Central American independence has evolved greatly in recent years, leaving aside the paradigm of "peaceful independence" and including new problems in the economic vision that has dominated historical literature for several decades. Despite this, the studies of what we currently have would not allow the levels of violence on the mainland to be equated with what happened in the independence period in the General Captaincy of Guatemala (Gutiérrez, 2009).

27 The psychological effects of the War of Independence on generations after 1810 have been scarcely investigated. Two works that can stimulate reflection in this way are Lande, *Psychological consequences of the American Civil War* (2016) and Fussell, *Wartime, Understanding, and Behaviour in the Second World War* (1989).

Venezuela was where a variant of total war arose for the first time in South America. Therein lies its uniqueness, only comparable to what had happened some years earlier in Haiti and some decades later in the War of the Triple Alliance. Other places in New Granada, such as the *Reino* (the central region of the Viceroyalty) or the Presidency of Quito (equivalent to present-day Ecuador), experienced a profound collective trauma caused by the increase in violence and the rational use of terror. The independence, for the first time, internalized conflict and violence in the daily lives of the inhabitants of the entire Viceroyalty.

So, what explains why this occurred in the Captaincy of Venezuela and not elsewhere on the continent? One of the elements explaining the emergence of the phenomenon of totalization of war in the *Costa Firme* was the combat units' permanent and quick reconstitution. The inclusive recruitment of all ethnic groups promoted the availability of troops, enabling this ability and the emergence of the modern idea of war interpreted in a context of violence that accentuated patriotic sacrifice. Violence became a central category in constructing political identity, particularly in Venezuela, where the opposing sides had few resources to differentiate themselves. Violence was the basis for tracing binary oppositions such as good/bad, fair/unfair, free/tyrant, or American/Spanish, distinguishing groups with divergent political interests.<sup>28</sup> The exercise of this violence had concrete effects that translated into an increase in the number of battles, deaths, victims, prisoners, and all the economic consequences produced by the fighting (such as displacement and famines). Above all, the use of violence was the factor that, combined with the Creoles' political interests, gradually transformed a civil war into an international one.

### “War to the Death”

On June 15, 1813, in Trujillo, Bolívar issued the decree of “War to the Death.” In this mandate, he determined that “every Spaniard who does not conspire against tyranny in favor of [the patriotic cause] by the most active and effective means, will be held as an enemy, punished as a traitor to the fatherland, and consequently will be irretrievably passed by arms.” (War to the Death decree, 1813, para. 4). For the first time, this decree identified a line between patriots and royalists in a civil war where the opposing sides had ambivalent contours. Moreover, it located and defined an enemy excluded from the political project, according to its origin (Spanish or Canary) and based on its ideological belonging (supporting or not the just cause of independence) (Hébrard, 2015). The execution of the “War to the Death” decree had immediate implications; within a few weeks, almost all the captured Spaniards and Canaries were killed. Subsequently, in February 1814, Bolívar ordered the shooting of 886 prisoners in Caracas, while all the Spanish patients at the hospital of La Guaira were killed with knives to preserve the ammunition.

28 The concrete exercise of violence can be seen in the *Historia de la Revolución de la República de Colombia en la América Meridional*, in which José Manuel Restrepo describes what happened in New Granada in the year 1813 (Restrepo, 2009).



The brutality that the war assumed from then on gave weight to Bolívar's reputation throughout the rest of the nineteenth century (Lynch, 2006). Royalist reprisals quickly followed after learning of the "War to the Death" decree. Boves set out with one of the largest *llaneros* armies in all Venezuela to reconquer and subjugate Bolívar's troops. The testimonies of the violence against the patriots and their families are appalling: rapes, tortures, massacres of women and children, and many other actions that showed that the struggle began to transgress a limit of what was acceptable (Bulletin n° 48 of the liberating army in Venezuela, 1814 as cited in Lecuna, 1955).

The "War to the Death" decree was the beginning of a war of extermination that erased the borders between combatants and non-combatants. If this distinction was clear in periods of peace, in the prevalent environment of violence, the boundaries between one group and another were increasingly blurred. The generalization of violence led the military establishment to consider that any interaction between the military and civilians of opposing sides could become a threat to the independence, and in this sense, it was legitimate to indiscriminately attack military and civilians who defended the Spanish King's sovereignty. With the "War to the Death" decree, violence ceased to be one of the results of the revolutionary process, becoming one of the factors that shaped the entire political and military context of the clashes between patriots and royalists.

### **"The Terror"**

If the "War to the Death" decree threatened to place Venezuela in possible anomie, Morillo's reconquest of the central area of the Viceroyalty created a deep social trauma. The reconquest originated between 1815 and 1819, in a period that Colombian history has called "the Terror." During this period, the main political and military leaders who had supported independence were systematically eliminated (Espinosa, 1876, p. 129). "The Terror" was a rational dosage of fear, whose goal was twofold: to punish those that had risen against the King and to bring about forgiveness and restore authority over the King's subjects through love and disremembering.

In August 1815, Morillo organized the land and maritime blockade of Cartagena from Santa Marta. This main port in the Caribbean was one of New Granada's first independentist bastions. The city resisted for several months before falling in December into the hands of the royalists, who opened the gates of the walled city to discover a scene of total death and desolation. Nearly six thousand people died during the siege, amounting to one-third of the city's total population (Encina, 1961, p. 577). With Cartagena conquered, Morillo began to penetrate the interior of the Viceroyalty, towards the center of the *Reino*. At the same time, Juan de Samano y Uribarri advanced from Quito, aiming to restore the royal authority throughout the Viceroyalty. Morillo and Samano's advance was accompanied by systematic executions of patriotic leaders, including Francisco José de Caldas (the most prominent scientist in that part of America) and Camilo Torres (author

of the *Grievance Memorial*, one of the key documents to understand the criollo claims against the crown). Other executions of independence leaders, their collaborators, and their supporters took place in Socorro, Santa Fé, Cali, and Popayán. Those loyal to the patriots took refuge in the eastern plains of Casanare, only returning to the central area of the Viceroyalty in 1819 under the orders of Bolívar.

## Demographic consequences

The demographic consequences of the war reached their paroxysm in the Captaincy of Venezuela. In the *Letter of Jamaica*, Bolívar mentioned that the events that occurred there between 1810 and 1815 had “been so rapid and their devastations such that they have almost reduced it to an absolute indigence”; according to his calculations, Venezuela had about one million inhabitants, “and without exaggeration, it can be assured that a quarter has been sacrificed for land, sword, famine, plague, pilgrimages: except for the earthquake, [all these deaths are the] result of the war.” (Bolívar 2015, p. 12). The statistics from various registered censuses between 1807 and 1825 show varying results, but all coincide in pointing out the demographic catastrophe. José Manuel Restrepo, the author of the first history of the Colombian independence, stated that Venezuela went from 800,000 inhabitants in 1810 to 659,633 in 1825, reducing the total population in 15 years by approximately 21.2% (Siso, 2012).<sup>29</sup>

The increase in the number of victims between 1813 and 1819 was due, in part, to the increased number of people recruited. However, other factors also contributed to amplifying the consequences of the war among the population; additional mortality factors included frequent civilian displacements due to fighting, exposure to weather, and extreme hunger. What occurred in the Viceroyalty of New Granada was not too far from what had happened in Haiti or the French Vendée. The war in Venezuela produced a generalized alteration of the agricultural cycle throughout the Viceroyalty and an almost complete stagnation of food production. Also, the constant movement of troops caused *mysterious fevers* (most likely yellow fever) and malaria to spread throughout the 1820s. These diseases continued to decimate the population even after the end of the war. Thus, deaths due to other factors, including displacement, famine, prolonged exposure to the elements, and different kinds of infections, were the main causes of mortality during the entire period (Sotomayor, 1997).

29 Other works offer figures on the evolution of the Venezuelan population, but they do not always specify their sources or the geographical area to which the sample belongs. For example, Harvey (2000) suggested that “more than a quarter of a million have been killed in achieving Great Colombia’s independence,” and Scheina (2003), in his work on the Latin American wars, mentioned that “Venezuela lost about one-fourth of its one million population.”

## Total war, between religion and politics

*Total* is a strong adjective that is not restricted only to the secular world; it also refers to the spiritual component of any combat. The religious dimension of the wars of independence in Latin America reveals a rich range of possibilities in considering the totalization of a war phenomenon. Catholicism allowed many of the war's actors to fulfill the *Costa Firme's* political, institutional, and social practices during the revolutionary period (Hébrard, 1996, p. 136-138; Demélas, 2004). The theological register made military mobilization possible, as well as the construction of an absolute enemy and the creation of a language of extermination used by the opposing sides. "The spiritual combat is as brutal as the battle of men," wrote the French poet Baudelaire (Rimbaud, 1873, p.52). Therefore, it is worth discussing some elements of the theological-political background of the totalization of war in the independence period.

### Mobilizing souls

What could be called the *mobilization of souls* followed the Hispanic crisis and the independence process. In 1808, the empire's entire population revolted to defend God and the King against an impious invader representing debauchery and chaos (Demélas, 2004, p. 15). Much of the Spanish counterrevolutionary propaganda against the French Revolution had great acceptance among the lower layers of colonial society; it was used to demonize the white Creoles who defended the rupture with the metropole (Guerra, 1992, p. 119). In the cold streets of Santa Fé, Napoleon was known as "the Antichrist," and the installation of the Bonaparte dynasty on the Spanish throne presaged a "general revolution and the greatest calamities." (Espinosa, 1876, p. 7)

The subversion of the monarchical order was a spiritual problem. The destruction of the imperial pact not only meant altering the administrative and institutional system that Spain had built over the course of three centuries; it also represented a change to the entire system of social and religious references, the King serving as a link between the human and divine worlds. In this *Weltanschauung*, the Christian values implanted by the Catholic monarchy meant much more than a republican belief in which the white Creoles were going to maintain themselves at the head of the social order. In great measure, this explains how the royalists were able to mobilize a significant number of blacks and mulattoes in Venezuela in the name of Christianity and against the republic between 1810 and 1813 (Thibaut, 2007).

### A holy war

After 1813, religion began to give the patriots a determination that no other type of discourse could, "a determination that did not allow for backward steps" (Demélas & Saint-Geours, 1987, p. 57). The reference to "holy war," interpreted in the context of the independence process as the crusade to expel the Spaniards from the American homeland,

was recurrent in many sources. Various examples abound. In a register that unites Natural Law and the emergence of modern patriotism, Bolivar, uses it to exhort the soldiers of Cartagena and the troops of the United Provinces of New Granada to start the Admirable Campaign: “You faithful soldiers will march to redeem the cradle of Colombian independence, just as the crusades freed Jerusalem, the cradle of Christianity” (Conde, 1836, p. 2). One year later, in 1814, Juan Fernández de Sotomayor y Picón, one of the priests arguing for independence in New Granada, wrote in his *Catechism* or *Popular Instruction* that the war of independence was “a holy and just war, and perhaps one of the holiest and just wars that have been fought in many centuries because its purpose [was] to recover the right to exist free of any tyranny” after the long period of insults and deprivations by the Spaniards (Cardona, 2015, p. 407).

The recurrent use of terminology and biblical metaphors was part of an amazing process in which the corporate organization of the religious communities was put in service of independence. The most interesting example of corporate recruitment took place in the Audience of Quito, where the break with Spain took the unexpected form of a religious utopia (Demélas & Saint-Geours, 1988, pp. 85, 90). More than in New Granada or Venezuela, in Quito, the participation of Mercedarians, Dominicans, and especially Franciscans in the waging and execution of the war made religious communities one of the privileged nuclei of military mobilization: “a third of the insurgents (...) were members of the clergy and about half of the church of the Audiencia had participated directly in the insurgency.” (Demélas & Saint-Geours, p. 90). With the integration of the religious orders in the fight against Spain, Quito gave an example of a new means of recruitment in the Viceroyalty.

Religion not only offered the possibility of increasing mobilization; it also justified a cruel war against a hard-to-identify enemy. Building an absolute enemy was one of the most difficult tasks for those who only a few years earlier had been considered “sons of the same King” and “brothers of the same family,” living in different hemispheres of a transatlantic monarchy. How was it possible to legitimize the war and the destruction of their brothers? In a war accompanied by the emergence of a public sphere of information, the transmission of simplified messages based on deep dogmatic Christian concepts was a way to take humanity from the adversary and justify its extermination.<sup>30</sup>

The pattern in which cruelty, impiety, and the absence of humanity were concomitant with demonizing the adversary, justifying his extermination, was recurrent. One of the liberating army's bulletins (written in 1814) clearly stated this position. It described that during the Siege of San Mateo, Boves' troops “raped defenseless women, they tore out their tongues” and later destroyed the “temples that they found in their path, the

30 In the *Costa Firme*, the absolute enmity required a demonization that could only be operated in a religious register: the *other* was an incarnation of evil that had to be exterminated. Thus, the increase in violence levels became inseparable from the progression of religious propaganda, justifying the annihilation of the opposite side.

sacred relics, and the custodies.” Beyond these atrocities and sacrileges, they left in the “San Francisco temple the inert body of a raped woman to later attack the young students and the nuns.” (Bulletin n° 48 of the liberating army in Venezuela, 1814 as cited in Lecuna, 1955, p. 52). Such atrocious acts proved that the royalists deserved expulsion from America and death under the arms of the patriots.

### **The Bible: a sacred weapon**

In the years between 1810 and 1820, both the *New* and the *Old* Testament, mentioning the diverse forms of governments and societies, were used to legitimize the absolute monarchy and sustain the constitution of the republican governments (Guerra, 2003, pp. 155, 189).<sup>31</sup> However, the strategies differed: some argued that royal power had no limitations because it was a power exercised by divine mandate; on the contrary, others favored the uprisings against a tyrannical authority that violated the rights of the communities, which were divine. One of the most critical points of discussion had to do with obedience to the royal authorities. Was disobeying the King a sin against God? Or, on the contrary, could “disobedience” be legitimate when tyranny was demonstrated? In the *Instructive Vassal*, the Capuchin monk Joaquín de Finestrada –sent to reconcile souls in New Granada after the Rebellion of the Comuneros in 1781– argued that the source of the King’s authority and the power was God (González, 2000)<sup>32</sup>. For Finestrada, there was no doubt: disobedience against the royal authorities was not only a political crime but one of the most serious sins directly affecting God.

In his *Catechism* (1814), previously-mentioned Fernández de Sotomayor y Picón refuted practically all of Finestrada’s demonstrations, based on his general understanding of the Bible and an ability to expose Christian dogmatics’ issues with surprising ease. He argued that having been obtained without the consent of the natives, the titles of possession of Spanish kings over America were invalid and that the right to rebellion was legitimate because the royal authorities had acted tyrannically. Moreover, he addressed one of the moment’s central questions, pointing out that there was no incompatibility between “any type of political regime and the Catholic religion since this could fit perfectly to monarchies and republics, to free governments and to despotic ones” (Cardona, 2015, p. 409). The impact of the *Catechism* in the patriotic discourse was significant. Its effect was huge

31 In a social context in which religious references were widespread, the catechisms and religious manuals, the Bible, and biblical history were weapons of amazing effectiveness. More than classical thought or enlightened philosophy, Catholic culture was a means to transmit political messages in an accessible manner. However, religious propaganda was only one of the manifestations of a movement that included the literate elites, who initiated authentic Christian dogma and exegesis battles to justify or reject independence. These combats impacted the separation of the opposing sides and the military mobilization. However, their degree of sophistication confined an important part of them to the selected group of the exegetes.

32 Finestrada’s *Instructive Vassal* was one of the texts with the widest circulation in the Viceroyalty at the end of the eighteenth century.

among the audience of readers of the *Reino* in those years, something that can be inferred from the Cartagena ecclesiastical authorities' persecution against the author and the text.

Juan German Roscio, a former jurist of the Viceroyalty of New Granada's audience who took the flags of independence after 1810 and became secretary of foreign affairs of the First Venezuelan Republic (1810-1812), emitted the most significant refutation of the absolutism's religious legitimation in the Hispanic world. His work, *The Triumph of Freedom over Despotism*, was published for the first time in Philadelphia in 1817. During the first half of the nineteenth century, it saw five more editions, two in the United States and three in Mexico.<sup>33</sup> Like many other men of independence, Roscio combined Iberian illustration, liberalism, and both civil and canon law to legitimize the struggle against Spain.

One of the most interesting aspects of Roscio's work was the use of the history of Israel to legitimize the war against Ferdinand VII. To support his argument on the right to rebellion, he invoked the alliance that Judas Maccabeus, the leader of the rebellion against King Antiochus IV Epiphanes, signed with the Roman Republic to fight for total independence for Syria (Bar-Kochva, 1989), something that evidently required justifying that "any man can arm himself against the oppressive power to recover his usurped rights" (Roscio, 1996, p. 91). More radically, in speaking of the story of King Ahab of Israel and his consort Jezebel, Roscio argued in favor of the legitimacy of tyrannicide.<sup>34</sup> He illustrated, firstly, how the monarchy allows the abuse of power against the subjects, and, secondly, how the subjects have the right to kill the sovereign when he violates fundamental principles such as the respect of the property of his subjects.<sup>35</sup>

### Encyclicals against independence

The responses to the patriotic arguments came from the highest hierarchies of ecclesiastical power. In 1816, Pope Pius VII, restored to power after the Napoleonic humiliation, addressed the encyclical *Etsi longissimo terrarum* letter to all the "Archbishops, Bishops and beloved sons of the Clergy of America subject to the Catholic King of Spain." The Pope had decided to defend the rights of Ferdinand VII in America, and called to "spare no effort to uproot and completely eradicate the evil weeds of rioting and seditions that the enemy has sown in those countries" (*Etsi Longissimo Terrarum* de Pío VII, 1816, para.

33 It was a text widely read and used by the Mexican President Benito Juárez Guerra: "*Políticas sacadas de las sagradas escrituras*" (Guerra, 2003 p. 155).

34 The story of Jezebel is portrayed in the biblical book of Kings. Her husband, Ahab, King of Israel, wanted to enlarge his gardens and buy Naboth's adjoining plot of land. Naboth rejected it because it was land inherited from his father. Then Jezebel fabricated false evidence of blasphemy against Naboth so that he would be stoned and Ahab could acquire the land.

35 One of the most suggestive problems that arise when reading Roscio's book is the possibility of conceiving the independence struggle as the manifestation of war within Christianity, not as the fragmentation of a transatlantic empire; this provides a different perspective to both the study of the independence phenomenon and the war phenomenon inherent to them.

3). In September 1824, Pope Leon XII noted in the new encyclical *Etsi Iam Diu* that the American local assemblies founded after 1810 “had been formed in the gloom of darkness (...) in which, as in an unmoved bilge, there is gathered everything there is and has been more sacrilegious and blasphemous than all the heretic sects.” (*Etsi Iam Diu*, 1824, para. 2). The two encyclicals clearly explained that those who held independence would disobey the papal authority, which was expected to preserve the American domains within the Catholic monarchy and dissuade the popular masses from supporting the patriots in the war.

The fact that many of its protagonists experienced the war as an apocalypse marking the end of one era and the beginning of another was a characteristic shared by the independence of the *Costa Firme* with other experiences of total war in the Atlantic world in the transition between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1825, Bolivar confessed to General Francisco de Paula Santander that after the victory of Ayacucho, a Spanish-French attempt to reconquer America would be a “universal war,” the last of the great wars to secure peace in the free world (Bolivar to Santander, 1825 as cited in Archivo del Libertador, n.d.). The rhetoric of the final biblical trial, in which the last combat would be to guarantee universal peace, was not a Bolivarian copy of what Brissot or Lauzanne had mentioned in 1792 in revolutionary France. It was a Spanish-American manifestation of a culture of war that shared characteristics with the European space and could prove that far from being a European phenomenon, total war, in this period, possessed a Euro-American dimension.

## Results and discussion: total war as plurality of warfare

Total war has traditionally denoted conventional interstate warfare.<sup>36</sup> However, rather than an option based on the empirical and historical analysis of war, such an inclination stems from an old and persistent tendency in military thought to belittle anything that has to do with irregular warfare (Picaud-Monnerat, 2009). Consequently, total war has been analyzed exclusively from the traditional conception of regular war, obviating any type of manifestation linked to irregular war. However, the possibility of challenging this analytical tendency and including the dialectic between regular and irregular warfare as a phenomenon within the totalization of war is one of the most suggestive elements that the war of independence in *Costa Firme* can offer the general reflection on total war.<sup>37</sup>

36 As can be clearly noted in Leon Daudet's *La guerre totale* (1918), Erik Ludendorff's *Der Totale Krieg* (1937), and other writings on this subject.

37 Although Carl von Clausewitz does not speak of total war in any of his courses or treatises, I believe that some of his analyses concerning the European wars of the early nineteenth century can contribute to a better understanding of the general phenomenon of total war. Clausewitz may be the only military theorist sensitive to the *Kleine Krieg* in the transition between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. During his course at the Military Academy of Berlin (1811), he pointed out that the *small war* was the expression of both the civil war in *Vendée* and the war of national liberation against the French in the Iberian Peninsula and the Tyrol. The diagnosis of Europe's political and military situations during the French expansion included the construction of the *Grande Armée* and

## Regular and irregular warfare

In the Hispanic imperial society, political modernity did not produce a regular military army (as in France); on the contrary, guerrilla groups were formed that faced the *Grande Armée*, the most powerful enemy that existed at that time in Europe. The Napoleonic troops' entrance to the Iberian Peninsula in 1808 produced a war of national resistance against a foreign invader based on tactics of harassment, surprise, movement, and ambushes (Schmit, 1975). As General Bigarré (1893) recognized, later on, the *partisans* of Spain dealt very hard blows to the French (Scotti, 2004). As on the peninsula, an irregular war also arose in the American part of the empire from 1810, becoming a successful national liberation war. However, there were some differences to what happened in Europe. They included (a) the weak popular support for the patriots at the beginning of the conflict; (b) the nonexistence of an organized regular army such as the *Grande Armée*, and (c) the duration and deepening of the war (the peninsular war lasted six years while the war in America lasted fifteen).

In the *Costa Firme*, the formation of the armies was marked simultaneously by a discontinuity in military terms and by continuity in political terms. The armies were formed and, months later, disbanded. Deaths, turncoats, and desertions made it necessary to constantly expand the recruitment base, which permanently impacted the civilian population, who had to integrate the ranks of the opposing sides to guarantee their survival. Although the growth of the armies did not follow a progressive pattern, the increase of popular participation represented a pattern of continuity during independence. Going into the war represented the guarantee of obtaining rights and property in the political order that would result from the war. The previous explains the simple but essential fact that the formation of the armies in the *Costa Firme* ran parallel to the construction of the modern nation. Recent historiography has shown that all racial groups in colonial society went into the armies, where a criterion of political equality that transcended the Creole elites was created and executed for the first time. The white Creoles fought to break the peninsular dominion, the mulattos to obtain a status similar to that of the Creoles, the mestizos to enjoy a social ascent, and the indigenous to survive (Lynch, 2006). Whatever it was, discontinuity and irregularity never meant the absence of social politicization.

The plurality of the many forms of warfare was one of the characteristics of the war in the *Costa Firme*. In his *Memoirs*, Morillo remembers that by 1815 his troops had to face a guerrilla war for which they were not prepared. Regarding his campaign in the immense Venezuelan plains, where the enemy knew the land well and had numerous sources that supplied them with horses, he stated, that “the most remarkable military talents and even

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different forms of resistance against it that did not obey a regular army's logic. Such a diagnosis led Clausewitz to accept a certain complementarity between regular and irregular warfare on tactical terms: irregular warfare depends on small mobile units that also exist within regular armies, such as the hussars or the hunters. Could we interpret the above as a form of complementarity between regular and irregular combat at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century?



the superiority of the forces became useless most of the time if the enemy refuses the fight and disperses” (Morillo, 1826, p. 122). By moving away from the populated mountainous areas where the royalist supply zones were located, the “wisest maneuvers” of the troops were paralyzed. When the “army [was] exhausted by marches and countermarches, then the enemy fell upon her unexpectedly with the immense advantage of finding men and horses frozen with fatigue (...)” (Morillo, p. 123).<sup>38</sup>

Even after the triumph of Ayacucho in 1824, at the height of the liberating army under Bolívar’s orders, the need to combine regularity and irregularity to continue the war did not appear to be an option but a necessity. In a letter to General Santander in March 1825, Bolívar mentions that Colombia should prepare for the “longest, broadest and costliest war” if France and the other members of the Holy Alliance decided to support Spain militarily in a new attempt at invading the *Costa Firme*. Because of their experience and naval superiority, it would be useless to fight a war of positions with line troops against the French because “they are very daring and with their artillery they make prodigies.” (Bolívar, S., personal communication March 11, 1825, para. 8). Bolívar mentioned that the example of the wars in Russia and Haiti should serve as the basis for the patriots’ strategy. To win, covering the entire coastline of New Granada and Venezuela by guerrillas commanded by very determined officers would be necessary. He continued:

The war should not begin until one or two years after the French army is destroyed [...] the French are very easily overcome with the delays, the privations, the obstacles, the weather, the annoyance and everything that comes with a prolonged war. (Bolívar, S., personal communication March 11, 1825).

### The hidden face of war

Both Morillo and Bolívar identified the alternation and complementarity that existed between regular and irregular warfare during the independence period, but two reasons led them to hide it. Firstly, since the eighteenth century, irregular warfare had been considered a form of warfare that did not respect aristocratic codes and was practiced by savage nations. Military honor continued to be understood as a quality related to regular warfare. In his *Memoirs*, Morillo sees the irregular war of Venezuela as a novelty when, in fact, he already had a partisan experience in his confrontation with the French troops in Spain. In his self-perception as a combatant, Morillo responded to an old code despite having faced the patriots with great strategic versatility.

The second reason was the value attributed to irregular war by the law of nations; the only legal war was a regular one (Schmitt, 1974). Any military activity outside of that

38 Morillo’s descriptions of the guerrilla fighting in the eastern plains contrast sharply with his descriptions of the mountainous areas of the Kingdom. The record of expression and analysis radically changes in his memoirs when he speaks of the confrontations against the patriots in the inter-Andean valleys, where a regular war occurred, fought by line troops, artillery, and cavalry.

framework would lack political legitimacy. As irregular warfare was the form of combat of uncivilized nations, accepting that independence was achieved through a war that had a plurality of forms of warfare was counterproductive to demanding the recognition of the independence and sovereignty of the new states before the European nations.<sup>39</sup> Thus, Bolivar and other patriots constantly referred to regular warfare in their proclamations and public writings and only addressed issues related to irregular warfare in their private correspondence. To obtain international recognition, hiding one of the essential parts of the war in the *Costa Firme* was necessary.

### **Total war and total state**

Finally, one of the most relevant results to be discussed in this analysis is the relationship between *total war* and the *total state*. A dominant analytical tendency in military history and war studies accepts an analytical premise present in the texts of Daudet and Ludendorff whereby the coordination, administration, and mobilization capacity of the state are the factors that allow an unprecedented intensification of the war effort. This vision of the problem is based on the experience of World War I, in which the states became the main political actors of the confrontation and the only ones capable of mobilizing the whole nation. However, when studying the case of the war of independence in Haiti and the *Costa Firme*, the process of totalization of war was raised in radically new terms. Total war would be the starting point of the nation and the state and not their consequence. The nature of the historical process makes it necessary to change the order of the terms in which the problem arises. However, it does not imply abandoning the analytical utility of the concept of total war.

Despite the horror produced by violence and brutalization, the displacement of the war to all spheres of social life acted as a creative and dynamic element to build a nation and obtain independence. The massive mobilization accompanied by the irruption of modern political discourse created a political and social revolution that altered many of the patterns prevailing in colonial society until that time. The war had not only defined the existence of an absolute enemy (Spain and the Spaniards), it had also imposed on the inhabitants of the Captaincy, the Reino, and the Presidency an idea of citizenship that could only be acquired and defended through arms. Thus, the nation that emerged from the war was not founded on a community of traditions but on a modern political pact that regrouped an imperfect, weak, and ephemeral but, nonetheless, independent nation.

Independence meant having enormous masses of combatants under a centralized political and military leadership. Over the years, this responsibility fell on Bolivar. After the collapse of the first and second Venezuelan Republics, the reconquest of Morillo, and the repeated failures of the patriot expeditions to reconquer the Venezuelan Caribbean,

39 The connection established between irregular war and savage nations was evidently related to an apparatus of metropolitan and imperial domination throughout the Atlantic world.

Bolívar never questioned the need to rethink his strategy to continue the war. He failed to learn from enemies who, like Morillo, showed him how to put the territory and population at the service of war. Nobody understood better than the Liberator the constant need to build an operative army as the basis for forging an independence that many of his contemporaries doubted.

Bolívar belonged to a young generation that had to assume institutional and military commitments for which it was not completely prepared. Waging war and winning it was a titanic effort, one of the many manifestations of an international order coming to an end and giving way to a new one. José Antonio Páez showed that despite the rigidity of the new republican society, independence had created an unimaginable opportunity for social mobility that had previously been impossible. After a gruesomely bloody war, Santander's administrative talent allowed the old viceroyalty to create a state that enjoyed some prosperity. This prosperous state, that also enabled the formation of the Colombian Army, subsequently liberated Peru and Bolivia. Sucre was perhaps the most daring and brilliant military man on *Costa Firme*. His talent was comparable to that of men like Morillo and José de San Martín. However, only Bolívar had the leadership to establish his authority over a constellation of military leaders, channeling the efforts of a generation to achieve a single objective: to neutralize the enemies of independence.

## Conclusions: total war and Latin American independences

Innovation in history involves including new concepts, proposing other chronologies, studying other kinds of sources, and establishing connections between actors, regions, and continents that have received little or no attention. A particularly important challenge for current historians is building a history of equal parts, which means interpreting historical phenomena in wider geographic spaces without necessarily privileging the North Atlantic area. Today, studying the Latin American Independences and the life of Bolívar is a challenge more related to interpretation than to the establishment of facts (Lynch, 2006). This endeavor requires accepting the risk of formulating interpretations that can be refuted or go unnoticed by the broader community of scholars.

This article is a proposal to introduce the concept of total war into the history of the *Costa Firme* between 1812 and 1820, a period characterized by unprecedented brutal violence originating in a civil war that became a war of national liberation against a European empire. One of the manifestations of total war occurred in the short time of the revolution in a peripheral Spanish Viceroyalty. However, as we have argued in the preceding pages, this manifestation's temporality was immersed in a broader area (the Atlantic) and process (the transition between the Enlightenment and political modernity). Therefore, when thinking that the *Costa Firme* experienced a total war comparable to other total wars that took place in the Atlantic world, we must study the Latin American independences in comparison to other categories that have not necessarily been present in the study of this period.

Any war of independence has a total component that differentiates it from other types of war. Building an independent state, issued from a sovereign power, is an imprecise objective, but it is not an ambivalent one. There are no intermediary formulas; a sovereign state either is or is not. Of course, the continuities between an old order and a new one are evident in any revolution. However, the political legitimacy of the new order can only come from a profound discontinuity that arises in an exceptional moment, that is, from lack of respect for authority or the norms that founded the old order. Independence implies a *total* break.

When studying the independence of the *Costa Firme* through the prism of total war, the question arises whether a war can be total only for one of the sides.<sup>40</sup> In New Granada, particularly in the Captaincy of Venezuela, war, hunger, diseases and the alteration of the cycle of agricultural production plunged society close to its destruction. Bolívar and many others were under the impression that what was truly happening after 1812 was a war of extermination. However, the royalist mobilization to reestablish control over the *Costa Firme* did not jeopardize the Spanish peninsular society. Some works point out that Spain was going through a demographic crisis, exacerbated by the war against the French. However, Pablo Morillo's expedition did not intensify the trend. In fact, contrary to what may be believed, the possibility that the war may have been total for only one side emerged at the moment the concept of total war was employed: How "total" was the Seven Years' War for England compared to the efforts by the territories governed by Frederick the Great? How "total" was the War of the Triple Alliance for Brazil and Argentina compared to the war fought by the Paraguayans? Thinking about the possibility of total war for only one side is a response that can clarify the relationship between a historical situation and the totalization of a conflict. At the same time, it amounts to raising the question asked by Jean Yves Guiomar (2017) in his book *L'invention de la guerre totale*: is there only one type of total war or several?

As we have argued here, the spatial framework of the totalization of war was not only limited to the European space. The phenomenon also manifested itself in the transition between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in two American zones of two European empires: Haiti and the *Costa Firme*. There are organic connections between the social militarization of the transatlantic empires in the eighteenth century, the conception of the citizen-soldier, the *levée en masse* of the French Revolution, and the different manifestations of total war in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The peculiarity of the *Costa Firme* was that the racial distinctions that had characterized colonial society were altered for the first time within the armies that created independence and gave way to a criterion of equality –imperfect, of course– but unprecedented in practically the entire Atlantic world. Like

40 This question had already been asked by Carl Schmitt in an article published in 1932. Despite all the pre cautions that we must take due to Schmitt's involvement with the Nazi regime, his reflections on total war cannot be ignored if one seeks to understand the theoretical anchor of the concept and its possible variations. (Schmitt, 2014).

in other cases of total war, the military determined and shaped social life for several years, but to do so, it had to accept that the structure of racial segregation on which colonial society had been built could no longer justify political authority. Such a transformation did not mean the advent of democratic institutions or legal pluralism, much less a racial democracy. However, it did represent a radical change that shaped in many ways the future of Latin Americans.

The Latin American Independences developed simultaneously with other historical phenomena on the Atlantic. However, the totalization of war only arose in certain parts of the Viceroyalty of New Granada between 1810 and 1820. In the General Captaincy of Venezuela, the opposing armies were recomposed more quickly after the imperial crisis of 1808 and after the Spanish *Reconquista* (reconquest) led by Morillo. It was there that, despite the fear of racial war, recruitment was generalized to all the population's ethnic groups, producing an unprecedented and general mobilization that was unique not only during the Independences but during the entire contemporary history of the great Colombian countries. Furthermore. No other civil or international war in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provoked such popular mobilization in such a geographical scope, no other civil or international war determined to such a degree the principles on which these societies would be reconstructed in the post-conflict period. For the Neogranadians in general, and Venezuelans in particular, the war of independence was different from everything they had experienced before; it marks their memory until the present day.

The historical figure of Bolivar is enveloped in numerous speculations, fiction, and stories that are almost impossible to strip away (Carrera, 2008). The romantic mantle and patriotic history created a heroic figure who is difficult to access. In addition, we must note that Bolivar was himself extremely careful to hide many of the facets of his public and private life. Indeed, understanding independence is difficult without touching on his trajectory and one of his most important political decisions: expanding recruitment to all ethnic sectors of society and convincing or isolating those who opposed it. The totalization of the war in the War of the Triple Alliance or the American Civil War was inextricably linked to the recruitment of multiethnic armies, a pattern that Bolivar contributed to create and strengthen. In this pattern lies one of the essential links between the totalization of the war and Latin American history and one of the possibilities to build a new collective symbol devoid of the Europeanizing conventions of the nineteenth century.

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