



# SEBASTIÁN DE BELALCÁZAR STATUE

Popayán, Colombia

2.4446636, -76.6023146



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## Executive Summary

The statue of Sebastian de Belalcazar, erected in 1940 in Popayan, Colombia, was torn down in September 2020 during a wave of protests. Local indigenous communities had long considered the statue as the embodiment of the city's colonial past, and a symbol of the continued impact on their lived experience. The initial response of civil society organisations and public figures to the demolition of the statue was overall positive. At the same time, local authorities condemned it as 'vandalism' and promised to rebuild the statue. A dialogue was initiated between indigenous and state officials a week after the events to negotiate its reconstruction and the construction of a second statue to commemorate the indigenous community, but it seems to have been fruitless. In January 2021, the monument was moved for restoration, and the contestation continues.

## Introduction

On September 16, 2020, the Misak indigenous people of Colombia tore down a statue of a Spanish conquistador Sebastián de Belalcázar – known for his greed and cruelty – that stood in the city of Popayán, Cauca, on a pre-Colombian sacred burial site known as the Tulcán Hill.

The event immediately generated intense debate about national heritage, with the city mayor announcing an immediate reconstruction of the statue to the indignation of indigenous and civil society organisations. While the monument remains guarded by the State and waiting for repairs, the contestation about Belalcázar's figure and legacy in Colombia continues.

## Background

### *Sebastián de Belalcázar*

Sebastián de Belalcázar, born Moyano<sup>1</sup> and called after his birthplace Belalcázar – or Benalcázar – in Córdoba, Spain. Belalcázar is known for being the Conqueror of Panama, Nicaragua and Peru, in addition, he conquered the Kingdom of Quito and the governorate of Popayán in the New Kingdom of Granada.<sup>2</sup>

Belalcázar set out to the New World in 1513, where he began his career as a soldier and a colonial official for the *encomienda*<sup>3</sup> system of forced labour and enslavement of indigenous peoples. Under the orders of Francisco Fernández de Córdoba, Captain Belalcázar collaborated in the conquest of Nicaragua in 1524. However, the substantial part of his career began in 1532, when he left his Panamanian possessions behind and joined the conquering expedition of Francisco Pizarro.<sup>4</sup> Because of this, Belalcázar is primarily associated with the conquest of the Northern extension of the Inca empire (modern-day Peru and Ecuador). However, he also travelled further North, leading an expedition in search of the mythical city of *El Dorado* (*The Golden City*), the lost city allegedly made of gold.<sup>5</sup> With this expedition, he travelled through the late 1530s into present-day South-Western Colombia, conquering indigenous strongholds and re-founding them as the colonial towns of Cali, Pasto and Popayán.<sup>6</sup>

During his expeditions, he engaged in land-grabbing, which made him famous for being cruel and violent towards the indigenous populations. Contemporary observers, such as Antonio Herrera y Tordesillas, Chief Chronicler of the Americas, described his actions during these expeditions as 'cruelty unworthy of a Castilian' (someone from Castile, Spain).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed biography of Sebastián de Belalcázar see: Manuel Lucena Salmoral, "Sebastián Moyano," *Real Academia de la Historia*.

<sup>2</sup> Manuel Lucena Salmoral, "Sebastián Moyano," *Real Academia de la Historia*.

<sup>3</sup> As legally defined in 1503, the *encomienda* system consists in a series of grants given by the Spanish crown to the *conquistadores* of a specific number of indigenous people from that particular region. In return, the *conquistadores* had the duty to protect and teach them the Christian faith. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Encomienda," *Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc.*, accessed January 20, 2021.)

<sup>4</sup> Centro Virtual Cervantes, "Sebastián de Belalcázar," *Centro Virtual Cervantes Quito*, accessed January 10, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> BBC News, "La verdad detrás del mito de El Dorado," *BBC News*, January 21, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Sebastián de Benalcázar" *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.*, January 01, 2021.

<<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sebastian-de-Benalcazar>>

<sup>7</sup> John Hemming, *The Conquest of the Incas*. London: Pan, 2004.

## *The Misak People and the Popayán Valley*

In the 1530s, during the Belalcázar Northern expedition, he and his soldiers arrived at the Popayán Valley, home to several indigenous communities, among them the Misak – or Guambiano – living together to defend themselves from other peoples who threatened their territory. The conquest of the Popayán Valley started in 1535, after Belalcázar’s arrival. By the end of the 16th century, the Indigenous communities had been incorporated into the Spanish colonial socio-economic structure, which drastically changed their culture and demographically decimated their communities.

There is no consensus among historians on the pre-Hispanic history of the indigenous populations of the valley, but there are different hypotheses.<sup>8</sup> The first one considers that the Misak arrived from Ecuador and Perú as a servile population, or *yanaconas*, brought by the Spanish system of *encomiendas*. This theory is based on the chronicles by Antonio de Herrera, who said that it was Belalcázar himself who arrived in the Valley accompanied by ‘service Indians.’ However, linguistic researchers reject this theory as the Yanaconas language is not from the same linguistic family as the Misak language.

Another theory argues that indigenous peoples were already living together in the Popayán Valley before Belalcázar’s arrival, forming what would be today considered a political unit known as the Guambiano-Coconuco Confederation.<sup>9</sup> Meaning they shared territory, culture and language and protected each other from outsiders. The promoter of this alliance was known as the cacique Pubén.<sup>10</sup> This idea is linked to another theory that claims that there was a society called ‘Pubenenses,’ formed by indigenous inhabitants of territories within the Popayán Valley, also known as Pubén Valley.



Figure 1: "Tulcán Hill" Image by Bernard Gagnon via Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 4.0

<sup>8</sup> ONIC, "Misak," ONIC, accessed January 10, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Cacique is an indigenous word denoting a community leader. Andres Cordoba, "La pirámide truncada de Popayan." *Agenda Propia*, July 25, 2016..

The Valley's community was centred around a ceremonial site on top of the *Morro de Tulcán* (Tulcán Hill). In the 1950s, archaeologist Julio César Cubillos carried out the first excavations of the Hill, discovering that it is shaped like a pyramid with the upper part being cut off.<sup>11</sup> Cubillos also found fourteen tombs with remains of buried adults and children and archaeological remains dating from long before Belalcázar's arrival, like clay pots, ornaments, proving that funeral rites took place there.<sup>12</sup>

Astonishingly, Cubillos' research demonstrated that the hill is not, in fact, a natural formation but rather a mound structured with sun-dried brick and pressed soil. The archaeologist Diógenes Patiño dates this structure and the society that erected it at around 1000 to 1500 AC. The construction takes the form of a pyramid that extends over 5 hectares and reaches 50 meters in height. According to the Misak historian Liliana Pechené Muele, the hill was a sacred centre of spirituality and healing, it was a pre-Colombian cemetery that existed 500 years before the arrival of the Spaniards, and a sacred temple where the gods, the sun, the moon, the stars and the rain were worshipped.<sup>13</sup>

### *Commissioning the Monument*

In 1936, the Governor of the Department of Cauca commissioned a bronze statue of Belalcázar on horseback to the Spanish sculptor Victorio Macho, who had previously built a Belalcázar sculpture for the city of Cali, the capital of the neighbouring department Valle del Cauca.<sup>14</sup> Which has also been toppled down in 2021 by Misak activists.<sup>15</sup>

The decision to choose a Spanish artist was reflective of a broader tendency of the so-called Liberal Republic government from 1930, which placed a significant emphasis on reinvigorating Colombian culture and education by bringing over Europeans to assist and imbuing Colombian culture with European trends and ideas.<sup>16</sup> A similar analysis is put forward by Felipe García Quintero, professor of the University of Cauca: 'placing the statue of the *conquistador* on top of the hill consolidates the process of white-washing the native cultural heritage, by recognising, reappropriating and resignifying Spanish heritage while disregarding and erasing indigenous culture.'<sup>17</sup>



Figure 2: 'Belalcázar Statue' Image by Sergio via Flickr CC BY-SA 2.0

<sup>11</sup> Camilo Gonzalez Posso, "La defenestrada de don Sebastián de Belalcázar," *Indepaz*, September 19, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Keka Guzmán, "La historia detrás de El Morro," *Co.Marca*, February 25, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Keka Guzmán, "La historia detrás de El Morro," *Co.Marca*, February 25, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Charlotte Eaton, "Reclaiming 'Colombian' identity: the toppling of Popayán's Belalcázar Monument," *LSE Blogs*, December 9, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Santiago Torrado, "Indígenas colombianos derriban por segunda ocasión una estatua de Sebastián de Belalcázar," *El País*, April 28, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Charlotte Eaton, "Reclaiming 'Colombian' identity: the toppling of Popayán's Belalcázar Monument," *LSE Blogs*, December 9, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Andres Cordoba, "La piramide truncada de Popayan." *Agenda Propia*, July 25, 2016.

Regarding the construction of the statue Charlotte Eaton notes:

The minimum specifications for the statue were 5.4 metres tall, 2.5 metres long and 1 metre wide, and its original cost was set at 65,000 pesetas (approximately USD\$8,500). However, the Spanish Civil War that broke out less than a month later caused disruption to the construction and delivery of the statue, which meant its installation was delayed considerably.<sup>18</sup>

According to the local authorities, the original plan was to erect two monuments: one in homage to Belalcázar, to be located on the city square, and another dedicated to Cacique Pubén, the historical authority for the Misak indigenous people, who was supposed to adorn the top of the sacred Tulcán hill.<sup>19</sup> However, not only was the statue of Cacique Pubén never erected but the monument to Belalcázar was instead placed on top of the sacred burial site.

Despite the approval of a new progressive constitution in 1991, which recognised Colombia as a pluri-ethnic nation, the legacy of centuries of exclusion and exploitation has not disappeared. Its effects are felt to this day. Indigenous people are disproportionately affected by multidimensional and monetary poverty, mainly by lack of access to healthcare and education and the continuous threat of violence posed by illegal armed groups that cover their land. Cauca is one of the departments with the highest concentration of indigenous people – accounting for a mere 4% of the Colombian population. At the same time, in 2020, it was the second department most affected by massacres (defined as three or more persons being assassinated), according to the peace watchdog Indepaz.<sup>20</sup>

## History of the Contestation

On September 16, 2020,<sup>21</sup> following a wave of similar events that attracted much media attention over the summer in the wake of Black Lives Matter protests,<sup>22</sup> a crowd of around five thousand indigenous people from the Misak ethnic minority tore down the statue of Belalcázar in Popayán. To do so, they tied ropes to the equestrian sculpture and after several attempts they succeeded in pulling it down.<sup>23</sup>

For historian Charlotte Eaton, ‘by toppling the statue of conquistador Sebastián de Belalcázar, indigenous protesters were reclaiming a Colombian identity from which they have consistently been excluded,’ adding that the activists ‘played a very active role in contesting and mediating the aforementioned influences [the problematic colonial legacy and the external influences following independence] to contribute towards the construction of a society from which they have often been officially excluded.’<sup>24</sup> Luisa Sánchez, director of the Anthropology Department at the Universidad Javeriana, stressed that ‘the monument is only a vehicle of indignation that should allow us a valuable opportunity to have a much more dynamic and inclusive dialogue

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Andres Cordoba, “La piramide truncada de Popayan.” *Agenda Propia*, July 25, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Indepaz, *Informe de masacres en Colombia durante el 2020-2021*, March 17, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> BBC, “Colombia: Indigenous protesters topple conquistador's statue,” *BBC*, September 17, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> NPR, “U.S. Statue Removals Inspire Indigenous People In Latin America To Topple Monuments,” *NPR*, September 30, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Infobae, “Artistas de Popayán pintaron el pedestal donde estaba ubicada la estatua de Sebastián Belalcázar,” *Infobae*, June 18, 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Charlotte Eaton, “Reclaiming ‘Colombian’ identity: the toppling of Popayán’s Belalcázar Monument,” *LSE Blogs*, December 9, 2020.

about how we want to be represented in the public space.<sup>25</sup>

Despite historical grievances associated with the figure of the conquistador having simmered for a long time, local media and indigenous authorities quickly pointed out that targeting the statue at that time did not come unexpected and cannot be ascribed to the global context only. Earlier the same year, The Movement of the Indigenous Authorities of South-West Colombia (AICO) had issued a symbolic judgement of the conquistador and declared him guilty of genocide, exploitation, torture and vicious murder, stating:

We, the descendants of those you could not torture and kill, are still here, 485 years later, clamouring for justice for the memory of...thousands of natives who fought in those bloody wars...We declare that the statue erected in the 1930s is part of the symbolic violence that has oppressed and silenced us...The day of the foundation of Popayán is a day of mourning, invasion and looting because the grandeur of what our people used to be was smashed by the cruelty of the Spanish troops.<sup>26</sup>

The regional and national authorities showed interest in repairing and reinstalling the Cali statue defending it as a historical monument of the city.<sup>27</sup> Juan Carlos López, Popayán Mayor, condemned the violent attack on the statue and stated that his mission is 'to protect public property and that statue is part of the municipality's property. Logically, we have to recover this statue, and our intention is to reinstall it on the hill.'<sup>28</sup> However, it remains unclear whether it will be reinstalled in its original place. The Cali statue could be used as a model to repair Belalcázar's head which was destroyed during the toppling. However, this was announced before the Cali statue was toppled by indigenous activists in 2021.

In the summer of 2021, the art collectives *Gráfica Criolla* (Creole Graphic) and *Entre Cuerpos* (Between Bodies) from Popayán intervened by painting the remaining pedestal of the equestrian statue.<sup>29</sup> According to an interview with W Radio, the collectives seek to:

'reclaim' and 'revitalise' the space in memory of the ancestral territories and the communities that inhabited and inhabit them. It is not a guerrilla approach, it is an approach that is coherent with the history that summons us.

Another artist from these collectives explained to the same medium that to carry out the intervention, they based their design on the explication of the *guaqueras* (those who illegally look for treasures in pre-Hispanic tombs and remains) and looked for historical references in the Museum of Natural History and that together with the participants of the project, they collectively worked on and decided the final design for the pedestal.<sup>30</sup>

### *The Public Response*

On the one hand, traditional media echoed the toppling down of the statue by the Misak activists and interviewed some of its protagonists. The most widely read weekly magazine in Colombia, *Revista Semana* (Week Magazine), published a short note that briefly quotes from

<sup>25</sup> Colprensa, "¿Qué hay detrás del derribo de la estatua de Sebastián de Belalcázar en Popayán?," *El País Colombia*, September 17, 2020.

<sup>26</sup> AICO, *Comunicado Rueda de Prensa*, June 25, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Popayán, "Alcalde de Popayán dice que la estatua de Belalcázar será restaurada," *El Tiempo*, September 17, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> El País, "Nuestra intención es volver a instalar la estatua en el morro": Alcalde de Popayán," *El País*, September 17, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Infobae, "Artistas de Popayán pintaron el pedestal donde estaba ubicada la estatua de Sebastián Belalcázar," *Infobae*, June 18, 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

the aforementioned statement issued by the AICO.<sup>31</sup> The runner-up in terms of outreach, the newspaper *El Tiempo* (The Time), called the toppling of the statue an 'act of vandalism' and compared the Misak activists with the BLM protesters that toppled Columbus statues in the US.<sup>32</sup> The radio station *Caracol Radio* (Radio Snail) reached out to Luis Eduardo Calambas, a representative of the Misak indigenous people, for an interview in which he called the existence of the statue a 'slap' to the Misak.<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, social media turned into a space of contestation as public figures, activists and authorities shared their reactions. The indigenous senator Feliciano Valencia said: 'Falls a symbol of 500 years of humiliation and subjugation of the original people.'<sup>34</sup> In a similar vein, Martha Peralta, a representative of the Wayúu people of north-eastern Colombia and the president of the political coalition Alternative Indigenous and Social Movement (Mais), applauded: 'De Belalcázar was genocidal to the people he conquered. My respect to the Misak who uplift their dead today. A symbol of 500 years of slavery falls to the ground.'

Popayán's Mayor Juan Carlos López took to Twitter to denounce the demolition of the statue as vandalism of public property and assured that Belalcázar would be reinstated at the top of the hill. 'We need reconciliation, to work together and understand that many different cultures live in Cauca. Here, there are not only indigenous people but also mestizos and Afros,' he added. Furthermore, speaking with the press he condemned the violence of the removal but showed his support for the Indigenous activists' claims and professed his willingness to open a dialogue about the events.<sup>35</sup> However, he also defended the monument claiming that 'monuments and statues are living museums, they are part of our culture. We can discuss whether they were bad or good, but they are part of our history, they are a reflection,' and added 'we can't go in and burn all the monuments because they mean something we don't like.'<sup>36</sup>

In response to the mayor's dismissive attitude, social media was flooded with messages of support which trended with the hashtags #MisakSomosTodos (We are all Misak) and #AlcaldeFuiYo (Mayor, it was me), but it also instigated the spread of threatening messages and pamphlets, alluding to armed persecution, disseminated through different channels such as WhatsApp chats and groups.<sup>37</sup>

The Academy of History of the Cauca Region published a statement emphasising the harmonious co-existence of ethnic minorities, invoking the idea of 'mestizaje,' or mixed-race heritage of Latin Americans. While it condemned the destruction of the monument as 'aggressive' and made a call to 'keep sane,' it also rejected the punitive approach taken by the mayor and urged him to consult all stakeholders. The Academy suggested the statue be relocated. It seems to discourage haphazard decisions, emphasizing that the site, as archaeological heritage, remains under strict control of the Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History (ICANH), given that 'unconsented and inadequate interventions

<sup>31</sup> Semana, "Sebastián Belalcázar: ¿por qué protestan los Misak en Popayán?" *Semana*, September 17, 2020.

<sup>32</sup> El Tiempo, "Indígenas tumbaron la estatua del conquistador Sebastián de Belalcázar," *El Tiempo*, September 16, 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Caracol Radio, "Estatua de Belalcázar era un símbolo de la opresión: Líder indígena," *Caracol Radio*, September 17, 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Telesur, "Colombian Indigenous Groups Topple Statue of Spanish Conqueror," *Telesur*, September 17, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Blu Radio, "Alcalde de Popayán dice estar dispuesto al diálogo sobre estatua de Belalcázar," *BLU Radio*, September 17, 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> El Espectador, "#AlcaldeFuiYo: el respaldo a los indígenas Misak que tumbaron la estatua de Belalcázar," *El Espectador*, September 19, 2020.

might cause just as much or more harm than the violent take-down of the sculpture.<sup>38</sup>

Academics and activists showed much more pronounced and unhesitating support to the Misak community and seconded the statue's removal. A statement published by anthropologists from the Colombian *Universidad Externado* was signed jointly by other academics, activists and artists and reached 633 signatories.<sup>39</sup> It makes a clear call to grapple with the colonial past of the region and recognise the historical grievances and rights of indigenous people:

We reject the attempts to trivialise and disqualify with the moniker “vandalism” which is an act of political nature... This way of interpreting what happened, reduced to a discussion of the materiality of the statue, denies the profound historical harm which was expressed in this symbolic act and makes secondary the duty we have as a society to discuss historical justice and offer reparations to our people.<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, professors of the Anthropology Department of the University of Cauca published a joint statement in full support of the actions of the Misak people. The statement is worth quoting at length, as it articulates the questions over the nature of national heritage and the construction of national identity, which are at stake:

Heritage is not something natural, ahistorical, or stable. The decision taken in 1936 to install a statue of a brutal Spanish conquistador on top of a pre-Colombian piramide was a deliberate act of affirmation of that which is Spanish, white, of a single history told by the victors (which, as usually, silenced the history of the defeated) ... To reinstall [the statue of] Belalcázar on the Tulcán Hill would be a grave error, as it would reinforce a violent and dismal past. Its falling is an opportunity to decide what to do with such an emblematic place. It could be an opportunity to give the spotlight to a nuanced retelling – a multivocal and generous story without silences – of what happened centuries ago and what keeps happening today.<sup>41</sup>

## Decision-making process

After holding a security council meeting, the mayor López confirmed a 5 million peso (US\$1,400) reward for any information that could allow for the identification of the material or intellectual authors of the destruction of the statue.<sup>42</sup> The reward sparked outrage within vast civil society sectors, since, given the presence of illegal neo-paramilitary groups in the region and the history of violence against indigenous people.

Nonetheless, the Minister of Culture, Carmen Vásquez, shared her support for the mayor of Popayan, promising to accompany the reconstruction of the statue. She called on the protestors to ‘manifest peacefully without affecting cultural heritage.’<sup>43</sup> The mayor was in such a rush to rebuild the statue that an excavator was immediately sent to the site to start construction work. At that point, the Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History (ICANH) announced on its Twitter profile that the hill is recognised as an archaeological site and, therefore, no alterations can be made to it without the Institute's previous assessment

<sup>38</sup> El Liberal, “Academia de Historia del Cauca se pronunció sobre derribo de estatua”, *El Liberal*, September 22, 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Las2Orillas, “Profesores de Antropología del Externado le dan la razón a los Misak en el Cauca,” *Las2Orillas*, September 23, 2020.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Consejo Superior del departamento de Antropología de la Universidad del Cauca, “Comunicado del departamento de Antropología a la opinión pública,” September 18, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> The city paper, “Popayan offers reward for perpetrator who toppled Belalcazar statue,” *The City Paper*, September 18, 2020.

<sup>43</sup> DW “Polémica en Colombia por derribo de estatua del conquistador español por indígenas,” *DW*, September 17, 2020.



and approval, which led to the successful removal of the machinery.<sup>44</sup>

Following the events, a dialogue was initiated between the government and the AICO. However, little is known about the course of negotiations. The governor of the Misak Ancestral Territory and member of the AICO, Luis Enrique Yalanda Hurtado, told the media outlet BLU that although an agreement was reached that stipulated that the Tulcán Hill would be declared a sacred site and the statue of Belalcázar moved elsewhere, the Vice-Minister of the Interior, Carlos Baena López, who was present at the meeting, refused to sign it on the grounds that he lacked the mandate to do so.<sup>45</sup> The following day, September 25, the Misak people blocked the Via Panamericana, a transcontinental route that is a common site for street-based protest, on its extent from Popayán to Cali. In response, the Town Council of Popayán announced the formation of a commission composed of eight delegates of the AICO and another eight government representatives, set to meet for the first time on September 28, but the outcome of its work remains unclear.<sup>46</sup>

On January 30, 2021, the mayor announced via Twitter that the remains of the statue had been transported to the military grounds of the Third Brigade to be restored following the technical guidelines provided by the ICANH.<sup>47</sup> The news outlet *Revista Semana* claimed that work was ongoing to construct a statue of Cacique Payán, a historical leader of the Misak indigenous community, to be placed on the Tulcán Hill instead, as initially planned in the 1930s.

## Summary and conclusions

The controversy surrounding the statue of Sebastián de Belalcázar dates back to its erection in the 1930s. The monument is dedicated to a Spanish *conquistador*, one known for his cruel treatment of indigenous people, and was purposefully located in a sacred site of memory and reverence for the indigenous communities of the Popayán Valley. Although a century has gone by, the contestation over Belalcázar's statue and legacy was reignited thanks to similar events on a global scale, mainly the BLM protest of the summer of 2020, which also toppled many colonists' statues around the world like Colston, Columbus or Rhodes.

This case study illustrates many of the difficult decisions we face when addressing issues related to contested histories. On the one hand, the diverse opinions represented by traditional media, social media, the government, and academics illustrate the great difficulty of attempting to find a compromise. On the other hand, this study also begs the question of whether finding a compromise is the right choice, to begin with. Should all positions truly be weighed equally if historical injustices have permanently silenced so many, leaving countless without any descendants to participate in present-day debates on their behalf? Should the descendants of the oppressed and the oppressors have an equal say in determining the correct cause of action? While these questions remain open in the case of the Belalcázar statue, the enormous controversy surrounding this discussion only shows the need to find closure.

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<sup>44</sup> ICANH, *Twitter*, September 25, 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Blu radio, "Se burlan como hace 500 años, el gobierno de Duque faltó a la palabra: indígenas Misak," *Blu Radio*, September 25, 2020.

<sup>46</sup> Alcaldía de Popayan, *Twitter*, September 26, 2020.

<sup>47</sup> *Semana*, "Estatua de Sebastián de Belalcázar fue trasladada en helicóptero para ser restaurada," *Semana*, January 31, 2021.

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## About Contested Histories

In recent years, there have been many contestations over memorials, street names, and other physical representations of historical legacies in public spaces. These contestations often reflect deeper societal tensions, whether triggered by political transitions, demographic shifts, inter-ethnic strife, or a growing awareness of unaddressed historical injustices.

The Contested Histories project is a multi-year initiative designed to identify principles, processes, and best practices for addressing these contestations at the community or municipal level and in the classroom. Conflicts about history, heritage, and memory are a global phenomenon, and although each case is different, comparative cases can indicate lessons learned and reflect best practices.

## About IHJR at EuroClio

The Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) is a research centre at EuroClio - European Association for History Educators in The Hague, The Netherlands. The IHJR works with educational and public policy institutions to organise and sponsor historical discourse in pursuit of acknowledgement and the resolution of historical disputes in divided communities and societies.

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