

Missionary interactions and Indian marriages in the frontiers (Maranhão early 17th century)

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Abstract

This study analyzes the mission in terms of interaction, studying as the indigenous perspective as the evangelist's one. Indians and missionaries are actors in this ministry, which is never far from the colonial power relationship. It is through the issue of the Indians Christian marriage that the referred interaction is addressed. The marriage is the center of the missionary project of Indians transformation and it is the same as the center of indigenous resistance or negotiation. From the example of the French Capuchins sources of the early 17th century, in Maranhão, the research shows the wealth of the friar's writings by the history and the anthropology of the Indian in situation of contact with the missionaries.

Keywords: missionaries; indians; marriage.

Interações missionárias e matrimônios de índios em zonas de fronteiras (Maranhão, início do século XVII)

Resumo

Este estudo analisa a missão em termos de interação, estudando tanto a perspectiva indígena quanto a dos evangelistas. Índios e missionários são ambos atores nesse ministério, que nunca está distante da relação de poder colonial. É através da questão do matrimônio cristão dos índios que a referida interação é abordada. O matrimônio é o centro do projeto missionário de transformação dos índios, sendo, da mesma forma, o centro de resistência ou de negociação indígena. A partir do exemplo de fontes de capuchinhos franceses do início do século XVII, no Maranhão, o texto procura mostrar a grande riqueza dos escritos dos frades para a história e a antropologia dos índios em situação de contato com os missionários.

Palavras-chave: missionários; índios; matrimônio.

Interacciones misionarias y matrimonios de indios en zonas de fronteras (Maranhão, inicio del siglo XVII)

Resumen

Este estudio analiza la misión en términos de interacción, estudiando tanto la perspectiva indígena como la misionaria. Indios y evangelistas son ambos actores en este ministerio, que nunca está distante de la relación de poder colonial. Es a través de la cuestión del matrimonio cristiano de los indios que la referida interacción es abordada. El matrimonio es el centro del proyecto misionario de transformación de los indios y es de la misma forma el centro de resistencia o de negociación indígena. A partir del ejemplo de fuentes de capuchinhos franceses del inicio del siglo XVII, en Maranhão, el texto procura mostrar la gran riqueza de los escritos de los frailes para la historia y la antropología de los indios en situación de contacto con los misionarios.

Palabras claves: misionarios; indios; matrimonio.

Interactions missionnaires et mariages indiens en zone de frontières (Maragnan début XVIIe siècle)

Résumé

Cette étude analyse la mission en terme d'interaction, en étudiant à la fois la perspective indienne et évangéliste. Indiens et missionnaires sont chacun acteurs dans ce ministère, qui n'est jamais éloigné du rapport de force colonial. C'est à travers la question du mariage chrétien des Indiens que cette interaction est abordée. Le mariage est au centre du projet missionnaire de transformation des Indiens et fait également l'objet de résistance ou de négociation indigène. A partir de l'exemple des sources des capucins français du début du XVIIe siècle dans le Maragnan, le texte tente de montrer la grande richesse des écrits des frères pour l'histoire et l'anthropologie des Indiens en situation de contact avec les missionnaires.

Mots-clés: missionnaires; indiens; mariage.

The missionary sources have been considered as containing a single speech about the progress on the “spiritual conquest”. Therefore, according to their personal beliefs, the historians have been reading them both to produce a linear narrative of evangelization as well as to report the dimensions of the spiritual project’s domination, which seemed to be just the ideological coverage of colonization. As for the anthropologists, they also took interest on the missionary sources, for they would contain information about the Indians, though these professionals would read those from a partial position. They would try to extract information on the Indians without contextualizing them, avoiding to even think about the missionary origin of these texts, for they were only interested of authentic and original indigenous culture that the missionaries had registered in their writings without really understanding so. Two decades ago, the missionary sources started to be the object of new readings both by anthropologists and historians. These writings do not figure as narratives of the monotonous conertion progress anymore, but are read for containing traces of the missionary interaction, the prolonged contact between Indians and missionaries, the basis of power relations related to colonization. The conversion is no longer seem as an imposed reality to the Indians because it would be the “truth”, but as a project of transformation of the Indians, which the missionaries would try to adapt and to reformulate during contact. The Indians are then analyzed as complete actors who interpret, appropriate or reject this project the missionaries propose or try to impose to them, according to the circunstances of colonization and the relations of power cannot be forgotten but in both sides of the interaction, Indians and missionaries observe each other, interact and negotiate. In this exchange, the containing of the beliefs is far from being the main topic, but the rituals, the way of life (sedentary habits, monogamy, work) were also in the center of negotiations. The mission is, therefore, seem by the historians as an interaction between Indians and missionaries that experts on indigenious history and the missionary historians can decipher.¹

However, when projecting the mission as an interaction, the historian is immediatelly confronted with the sources issue and with a great imbalance. On the one hand, the European missionaries left texts of all sorts: administrative texts, rules letters, narratives, chronicles. On the other hand, the Indians did not, or almost not write. The historian should then be wise, to try to understand the indigenous reactions from what the missionaries would say, read between the lines and try to listen, as much as possible, to the indigenous voice in the colonizers texts.²

¹For a more detailed presentation of these hystoriographical issues surrounded by the use of missionary sources by missionaries and anthropologists, see my article “*De l’observation à la conversation: le savoir sur les Indiens du Brésil dans l’œuvre d’Yves d’Évreux*”, In: Charlotte de Castelnau-L’Estoile; Marie-Lucie Copete; Aliocha Maldavsky; Ines G. Zupanov, *Missions d’évangélisation et Circulation des Savoirs XVIe-XVIIIe siècles*, vol. 114, Madrid, Casa de Velazquez, Coleção Casa de Velázquez, 2011, p. 269-294.

²Frank Salomon, “Testimonies: The Making and Reading of Native South American Historical Sources”, In: Frank Salomon; Stuart B. Schwartz (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, vol. 3 South America, part 1, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, chapter 1, p. 19-94.

Tupi Indians and the French Capuchins in early 17th century

In this study, we privilege the writings of the French missionaries, the Capuchins in the North of Brazil in the beginning of the 17th century. In 1611–1615, the Capuchins from the Province of Paris involved in the ephemeral colonial adventure of equinoctial France, in the North of Brazil, when the Portuguese were not yet installed in Maranhão.³ Two reports of this colonial adventure were written by the Capuchins Claude d'Abbeville and Yves d'Evreux. After a trip to Brazil for six months in 1612, Claude d'Abbeville returned to Paris and wrote a *History of the mission of the Capuchin priests* in the island of Maranhão.⁴ Yves d'Evreux, after two years in Maranhão, wrote the *History of the most memorable facts that happened in Maranhão* in the years 1613 and 1614.⁵

One of the peculiarities of these French sources is the exceptional attention both Capuchins give to the indigenous words. Claude d'Abbeville inserts in his narrations long indigenous speeches, such as the ones from Iapy Ouassou (chapter 11) and from Momboré Ouassou (chapter 24). Throughout his chronicle, Yves d'Evreux also gives great attention to the indigenous voices. The last six chapters of his treatise are the “conferences”, presented as transcriptions of long conversations the missionary would have kept with different Indians, chiefs or sorcerers. We cannot believe ingeniously that these conferences are simply transcriptions of conversations or that the indigenous speeches are “direct recordings”. There is, obviously, a whole work of rewriting, replaying and formatting the indigenous speech, in these texts, printed in Paris, in the second decade of the 17th century. However, for many reasons, related to the Capuchin culture and to the Tupi one, it is possible to think that these indigenous voices, even if mediated, were not only product of the missionaries’ imagination, but represented also a native point of view as it informs us about the indigenous dimension in the missionary interaction.

Why so much attention to the indigenous word in French sources? In France, early 17th century, peace is finally achieved after years of religious conflicts, but the country is still divided between two religions. The conference is a contradictory debate, written or oral, of the religious matter and this kind of debate had a great success in an era when weapons had been deposed, but the “paper war” would still go on, in the words of the *Mercure Galant* from 1605.⁶ Libelous books and brochures continue the embate. In these texts, the word of the religious opponent increases the prestige of the truth of the other religion which

³For the context, see Andréa Daher, *Les Singularités de la France Equinoxiale*. Histoire de la mission des pères capucins au Brésil (1612-1615). Prologue of Roger Chartier. Paris, Honoré Champion, 2002.

⁴Claude d'Abbeville, *Histoire de la mission des Pères capucins en l'isle Maragnan et terres circonvoisines* by R. P. Claude d'Abbeville, Paris, Imprimerie de Huby, 1614. Available on the site of the National Library of France. Gallica: <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k57399d>>, accessed on: March, 2013.

⁵Yves d'Evreux, *Voyage au Nord du Brésil*, édition F. Denis Paris, 1864 Available on the site of the National Library of France, Gallica <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5732857p>. This is the edition we used. There is a new edition with the complete texts: Yves d'Evreux, *Voyage au Nord du Brésil* (1615), edition of Franz Obermeier, Kiel Westensee-Verl, 2012.

⁶Bernard Dompnier, *Le venin de l'hérésie*. Image du protestantisme et combat catholique au XVII^e siècle, Paris, Centurion 1985, p. 174, names 166 known conferences with precision on their written registers of 70% they have been written between 1593 and 1609.

claimed to be the only truth. The French public is then, used to and passionate about these oratory games. It seems then this attention to the words of religious opponents made sense in the French context. Added to that is the taste of the French public for exoticism. The Normans who lived in the Brazilian coast, since the beginning of the 16th century, would often take Indians to France, where they had always been an object of great curiosity.⁷ Claude d'Abbeville and Yves d'Evreux wrote narratives of their missions in order to make known the colonial adventures of equinoctial France. The goal was to raise funds to enable the continuation of this adventure, abandoned at last. Then both the chroniclers would answer, somehow, to the French public's demands. In many locations of missionary activity, dialogue would often take place.⁸ But, in the case of tupinambá society, the speech and the dialogue are especially privileged cultural forms. Among the Tupi Indians, the prestige of their leaders is related to the art of oratory and to the ability of being "the masters of the words," name given to the leaders.⁹ However, the beautiful indigenous speeches within the Capuchin's texts refer to their usage in tupinambá society. In order to understand and translate the indigenous language, the two Capuchin priests rely on translators (truchements), because (the missionaries) themselves cannot speak Tupi well, though Yves d'Evreux had spent two years in Maranhão and having him taken interest in learning the indigenous language. The translators are usually French people, who had lived a long time in Brazil, where they would practice the trade of *pau-brasil* and join the colonial adventure of the equinoctial France. Two of those translators appear in the texts and are cited as interlocutors to whom the Indians would address to. They are Sieur des Vaux,¹⁰ French man from Touraine, who became a war leader in Brazil under the codename *Itajiba* (*Arm Wrestling*), and Migan, who came to Brazil when he was still a child and where he grew up. For the indigenous leaders, these translators are white men, but also men who speak their language, who share of their customs and who bounded alliances with them. It is those men who transmit and translate the indigenous word to the missionaries. Thus, despite the rewriting and the formatting involved in the final version of the treaties, such speeches and conferences, attributed to the Indians, refer back to the conversations and exchanges which had taken place between the French Capuchin and the Indians from Maranhão. The main theme of these talks were the process of transformation, triggered by

⁷About the French curiosity in relation to the Brazilian Indians, see the numerous works of Frank Lestringant, including *Le Huguenot et le sauvage*. La controverse coloniale, en France, au temps des guerres de Religion (1555-1589), Paris, Klincksieck, 1999.

⁸Ines G. Zupanov, "I am a great sinner": Jesuit Missionary Dialogues in Southern India (16th century)", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55.2-3 (June of 2012), Leiden: E. J. Brill, p. 415-446.

⁹Carlos Fausto, "Fragmentos de história e cultura tupinambá. Da etnologia como instrumento crítico de conhecimento etno-histórico," In: Manuela Carneiro da Cunha (org.), *História dos Índios no Brasil*, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 1992. On the importance of the dialogue in American culture, see Aurore Monod-Becquelin; Philippe Erikson (eds.), *Les rituels du dialogue Promenades ethnolinguistiques en terres amérindiennes*, Nanterre, Ethnology Society, 2000, p. 199-234.

¹⁰Des Vaux, born in Sainte Maure de Touraine, companion of Jacques Riffault, spent many years in Brazil, he has fought with the Indians, under the name of Itajiba, arm of iron. He left to France, by his companions request, to ask the King of France for the inclusion of Maranhão to the Crown.

the presence of the missionary priests, the meaning of Christianization and the power of God, referred to as Tupã.

In the North of Brazil, in the beginning of the 17th century, the Indians had a life of uncertainty and danger. The different tribes which lived in the region of Maranhão in that moment would relate, for a long time, to the world of the white. Some of these tribes had been there for a long time and some of them had arrived more recently. As Fátima Martins Lopes describes for the captaincy of Rio Grande do Norte, there is a process of evasion by Indians through territory not yet dominated by the Portuguese Power: Ceará and Maranhão.¹¹ This process was ancient, there are traces of migration since the 1540s, which were intensified with the advance of the Portuguese colonization and its corollary, the enslavement of indigenous populations.

"We need iron, fire and canoes to fight against the Peros (the Portuguese), and against the Tupinambás and other adverse nations"

The French were also important actors in the region, for they would trade with the tribes of the coastal area for many decades. This presence is enhanced after their ejection from the Baía de Guanabara and the region of Cabo Frio. In 1561, Jerônimo de Barros, son of the donatorious captain João de Barros, speaks of seventeen French ships in the Pernambuco region. Innumerable matrimonial alliances, as well as political and military ones, have united the Brazilian Indians from the North and the French. In 1579, a map drawn by Jacques de Vau de Claye shows a project of an impressive French-Indian war where is evoked the mobilization of 10 thousand potiguares warriors (Tupi Indians from the North) and tapuias (Indians from the hinterland wilderness) could have been involved.¹²

In 1599, a peace treatise has been signed between the Portuguese and the potiguares. The captainias of Rio Grande do Norte and Paraíba were then included in the colonial territory. The frontier recoils more towards North. From 1603 on, becomes the new desired space by the colonial authorities. Since then, various expeditions have occurred, such as the one of Pero Coelho, in 1603, the one of the two Jesuit missionaries Francisco Pinto and Luiz Figueira (in 1607–8) and the one of the military serving the governor, as Martin Soares de Souza.

¹¹Fátima Martins Lopes, *Índios, colonos e missionários na colonização da capitania do Rio Grande do Norte*, Mossoró (RN), Fundação Guimarães Duque, 2003.

¹²See the site of the exposition *L'Âge d'Or des Cartes marines* (A Era de Ouro dos Mapas Marítimos) in the National Library of France. The map of 1579 is found in the following address: <http://expositions.bnf.fr/marine/grand/por_085.htm>, Accessed: September 2013.

At the same time, the French intended to adopt a colonial design to their informal settlement. The project of founding a French “colony” in Northern Brazil is old, but it was in 1612 the the French equinoctial expedition has settled. The French came in name of the Queen of France, Maria de Médici, to the possession of the land through a colonial Project, with missionaries and rules. The colony was fragile, for it was still a project which depended on what would come with the following boats. And there was not enough time for its implementation: the French, abandoned by their monarchy which gave up on the Project of colonial expansion, were easily evicted by the Portuguese, supported by the Iberian Union, which planned to conquer the North of Brazil and Amazonia. An example of this was the foundation of the Belém was founded in 1615.

During the brief French period, the Indian situation was characterized by a great uncertainty and by the search for adaptation strategies. They knew the project of domination by the Portuguese and they knew slavery, they also understood that the French were not in an exchange and trade position anymore. Thus, we find between the lines of these missionaries’ narration, a history of the Indians in the colony at a critical moment: the colonial contact and the entry into the White domination, this being the main theme for talks and speeches. From the conversations between the missionary and the Indians, the historian is able to perceive the evangelization as a negotiated process of Indian transformation , in front of a new and uncontrolled colonial situation.

The conference with Jacoupen, registered in the book of Yves d’Évreux, chapter XIX,¹³ is a good example of conversion in a colonial situation. According to the words of the “Cannibals” tribe’s leader, who then asked Yves d’Évreux for baptism, it is clear that the indigenous leader had the intention to acquire the strength provided by Tupã, the God of the White and, especially, the French weaponry. Here is how he addressed to the missionary: “I much regret not being baptized for I recognize that, while I remain as I am, the devil can tempt me and give me hassles”.

Jacoupen narrates then the evils which his people suffered. Born in Pernambuco, his tribe started migration, led by a shaman: “in order to go and take possession of a good land in which, naturally, everything would itself as they wished, without they having any hassles or work”. During this migration, men would die by thousands at a time. The survivors were gathered by the French La Ravardière, and would be taken to the Island of Maranhão, by boat. There, they would engage into a battle against another tribe, the tupinambás, where more than a hundred men were killed. Icacoupen summarizes his request to the missionary: “We need iron, fire and canoes to fight against the Peros (the Portuguese), and against the Tupinambás and other adverse nations”.

After that first conversation, Yves did not yet judged Jacoupen ready to receive the baptism. For the missionary, the Indian still needed to learn “the Wonders of Tupã”. Some other day Jacoupen argued again with Yves d’Évreux “the diversity of the Nations”.

¹³Yves d’Évreux, *Voyage au Nord du Brésil*, édition F. Denis Paris, 1864, p.348-354.

I see the French are abundantly wealthy, they are brave, they invented the ships to cross the seas, the cannons and the gunpowder to kill men invisibly [...] And, on the contrary, all of us here kept errands and vagrants, without clothes, without axes, pruning hooks, knives and other tools.

This conversation is reported by Yves d'Évreux, which cleverly puts in evidence the superiority of the White technology and their God over the indigenous. It is, however, Jacoupen who was taking the initiative: he was coming, asking for the baptism, choosing the topics of conversations. This leads the missionary to the theme of the weapons and the power God grants to those who acknowledge him. In his text, Yves d'Évreux did not condemn the Indian for his "interested" view of the conversion, He chose instead to use the leader's motivation to deepen his knowledge of God. [The Capuchin did not baptize Jacoupen because he would preserve the sacrament as an except for children and the dying.] However, the missionary commented his talk with Jacoupen, mentioning "the ability of these souls to receive the Faith" and gave him a vague hope, though in agreement to the Christian doctrine and also with the leaders' aspirations: "And when He sees a man is willing to accept His faith, He does not fail to send his apostles to visit Him and those give you ways to save yourself".

The conversion to Christianity was presented, in the dialogue between the missionary and the Indian, as an adapted response to the new colonial context, a solution for the difficulties of that time.

We can speak here of colonial religion, meaning an answer forged both by the indigenous and the missionaries, in response to a colonial contact situation. The Capuchins professed in Maranhão, a religion adapted to the indigenous demand: a religion of an all mighty God, Tupã, victorious of the Devil Giropary, and presented as the only possible alternative to the Indians, confronted to the colonizations of the Portuguese and the French. The religion was not only transmitted by the missionaries to the Indians, but it would also become a way to cultural mediation, a redesigned language by the indigenous cultures, from their own representations and adapted to the new needs of the colonial context.¹⁴

The adoption of "civilization" and of the Christianity meant a deep transformation in the way of life and would go through a breaking of the family relations. The Indians would negotiate, with the missionary, this passage to the Christian model. In these conversations between the Indians and the missionaries, the issue of marriage showed up as one of the fundamental consequences in the colonization and evangelization process. It is around the marriage issue I propose to analyze the missionary interaction in the

¹⁴Jean Comaroff, John Comaroff, *Of revelation and revolution. Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991. For the colonial Brazil, Cristina Pompa has presented this kind of interpretation as in *Religião como tradução Missionários, Tupi e Tapuia no Brasil colonial*, Bauru (SP), Edusc, 2003.

present study.¹⁵ What did the Christian marriage mean to Indians and to missionaries? What was at stake?

The marriage, the essential matter in the interaction between missionaries and Indians

The Indian view of the Christian marriage

In his narrative, Claude d'Abbeville, it is inserted a speech from Momboré Ouassou, and old potiguar leader from the North of Brazil, who referred to the White men planting a cross in his village to Mark the alliance of his tribe with equinoctial France. At 90 years of age, born in the region of Pernambuco, Momboré Ouassou has a great experience in exchange with the European and with the colonization process. His speech contained the history of the Portuguese presence, who he calls *Pero* (which means dog): the first barter relations and to the slavery ones. He mentioned his fears regarding the French trying to do the same and intending to substitute the alliance relations for a relation of domination. To Momboré, the cross and the coming of the *Pay* (the priests) were alarming signs. Marriage was critical in the reasoning of the old Indian. Here is him:

I saw the arrival of the *pero* in Pernambuco and Potiú; and they started as you, French, do now. At first, the *pero* would do nothing but to traffic with no intention to settle. At the time, they would freely sleep with the girls, what our fellows from Pernambuco judged a great honor. [...] Then, they started to say they could not take those girls like that, that God would only allow them to have them through marriage and that they could not marry without their being baptized. And for that it was necessary the *paí*. [...] Later on, they claimed neither them nor the *pai* could live without slaves to serve and work for them. And thus, our kind felt compelled to provide to you.

As happened to the French. The first time you came here, you did so solely to traffic. Like the *pero*, you would not turn down our daughters and we would think of ourselves happy when they had your babies. [...]

After the arrival of the *Paí*, you planted crosses as the *pero*. You started now to instruct and baptize just like they did; you say you cannot take our daughters IF not by spouses and after their being baptized. The same said the *pero*. Like those, you did not want slaves, at first; now you ask for them and you want them, like they did, at the end. I do not believe, however, you have the same

¹⁵This article is part of my current research about the matrimony of Indians and of slaves in Brazil the colony, *Les chaînes du mariage, Catholicisme, Colonisation et Esclavage, Brésil colonial XVI-XVIII^e siècle*, Unpublished work presented by the dossier of qualification to supervise the researches, Paris Sorbonne, June of 2013.

objective the pero did; In fact, this does not frighten me, for as old as I am I fear no more. I simply say what I saw with my eyes.¹⁶

Momboré offered an endless chain of events from the experience of the Portuguese colonization. Initially, the Portuguese, as the French, were in a “traffic” relation, of commercial trade with the Indians. They were just passing by Brazilian lands. They would sleep freely with the Indians’ daughters and those would feel honored by that. Momboré has referred implicitly to the rules of indigenous unions. It was the father who would offer their daughters to the men who would become their sons-in-law. They were to suit their father-in-law, whether symbolically or materially. The arrival of the European meant new possibilities of alliance and of profit to the Indians. The parents would offer their daughters gladly to those men. The logic behind indigenous unions and

*From the missionary point of view, it was accident,
somehow, because the woman should die after
receiving the baptism*

the integration of the European in the alliance system and the trade of women are clearly explained by Momboré.

In a second stage, the Portuguese have installed themselves in a fortress. The men would not want the women the Indians kept offering them claiming God had forbidden them, except in matrimony, and they brought the priests who talked about the baptism and planted the cross. Thus the Christian marriage was imposed. At the end, the third stage was slavery. The Portuguese enslaved not only war prisoners, but also children and, therefore, the whole nation. For the Indians, it was the moment of escape. Momboré did not mention marriage anymore, in this third stage.

It was, finally, his own life what Momboré told the Capuchin. Born in Pernambuco, in 1520, the Elder saw the first relations of pau-brasil traffic in his childhood, while the Portuguese would content with collecting the tincture wood brought to the coast by the Indians and trade them by fishing hooks, axes and other valuable objects. The permanent installation of the Portuguese happened in two stages, with the creation of a trading post for the trade of pau-brasil, Crown’s monopoly, followed by the founding of the capitania, in 1534, with the installation of the donee Duarte Coelho and his wife Beatriz de Albuquerque, both from noble Portuguese families. The extraordinary success of the capitania of Pernambuco was based exactly on the alliance with the Indians. The captain’s brother-in-law, Jerônimo de Albuquerque, was a

¹⁶Claude d’Abbeville, *Histoire de la mission des Pères capucins en l’isle Maragnan et terres circonvoisines* by R. P. Claude d’Abbeville, Paris, Imprimerie de Huby, 1614. Available in the website of the National Library of France, Gallica: <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k57399d>>, accessed in: March of 2013. Chapter XXVIII: *De ce qui se passa à Eussaouap pendant notre visite*. Repressão do velho chefe Momboré Ouassou, p. 148-150.

symbol of this alliance: he has a long term relationship to the daughter of Arcoverde, the chief of the potiguar Indians of the region. When Momboré mentioned the great honor for the alliances between Portuguese and indigenous, He may have referenced to this union in particular, which is an example of union between Portugal's nobility and the local nobility.

With this alliance with the Indians, Duarte Coelho has introduced the cultivation of sugar cane in his captania. It was with the help of the Indians that he cleaned and built five sugar mills that were in operation in 1550. Among the other Brazilian capitanias, only Pernambuco and São Vicente succeeded in this initial moment; both would count with the alliance with the In.¹⁷ In São Vicente, the key figure to the alliance, essential intermediary, was João Ramalho, Portuguese installed in Brazil since 1511, Tibiriçá's son-in-law, tamoio chief Piratininga.¹⁸ In both cases, the alliance between the Portuguese and the Indians is sealed by those young women given away by their own parents to foreigners.

In Pernambuco, the relation between the Portuguese and the Indians deteriorated with the arrival of many settlers, most of them exiled from Portugal (banished) and who always wanted more slaves. Duarte Coelho wrote to the king complaining about these men: "we lost the trust the Indians had on us so far". That menas the newcomers did not respect the alliances and would not content in only captivate the enemies. It is also in the early 1550s that the first Jesuits arrive to Pernambuco, who pinpoint in their correspondence the great number of slaves and who try to impose the Christian marriage to this mixed society. To Momboré, slavery, marriage and religious conversion go on side by side and make their appearance in the mid 16th century. Since 1560, the incessant demand for slaves causes a general war and the escape of the Indians to the North. The Jesuit and the colonial sources corroborate the memories of the old Indian and his narrative structure was then exact. During a long life, this Indian saw the whole process of the colonial alliance develop, as well as the change to slavery and war. In this story, the passage from Indian alliances to Christian matrimony was the key moment of the imposition of domination: the refusal of the indigenous women by the Europeans was equivalent to the refusal of trade of equal parties. The same way, the imposition of the Christian marriage was shortly followed by the slavery. The speech of Momboré caused a stir among the Indians who thought, without a doubt, was very much true. The French had to convince the Indians that their intentions were not like the ones of the Portuguese. This "indigenous" version of the history of colonization in Brazil in the 16th century showed, therefore, the changing to Christian marriage as an essential moment to the imposition of the European domination.

¹⁷Maria Regina Celestino de Almeida, *Os índios na História do Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, FGV, 2010, chap. 1.

¹⁸You can use the notion of the intermediary « *go between* » between the indigenous and the European developed world, among others, by Alida Metcalf to the colonization of Brazil. Alida G. Metcalf, *Go-betweens and the Colonization of Brazil 1500-1600*, Austin, TX, University of Texas Press, 2005.

The Christian marriage according to the missionaries

Before the speech of Momboré Ouassou, another cheif, Iapy Ouassou questioned the missionaries about matrimony. The missionary Yves d'Evreux answered the chief's questions and his speech can be found in the 11th chapter of Claude d'Abbeville's narrative. At first, the missionary qualified the alliances the French used to have with the Indian girls as "prostitution". What was at stake in those sexual relations, was an alliance relationship, as father-in-law and son-in-law, and the foreigners offered gifts (fishing hooks, axes) to the Indians to get married with their daughters. Then, the Capuchin priest also explained the Christian marriage to the Indian chief, giving emphasis to its religious dimension.

As for the women, God comands we never get married; and forbids us their company so we can more purely serve, for He desires his sacraments to be handled only by the ones living in chastity. As for the other Christians, their children by baptism, God grants them the freedom to either marry or not, and allows them to have one woman solely, just as to the women one only husband who they shall never leave; and they do so, if they break apart, God does not allow them to seek for another one, therefore, men who have many women, and the women who give themselves to many men, are not true children of the great Tupã, but instead slaves from Jurupari, the Devil.

If some of thou wish to be a son of Tupã and to recceive the holy baptism, it is necessary to leave the prularity of women allowed among thee. It is thy decision. We have nothing with it, for we did not come here to compel one to whatever it is, but instead to teach thee with the highest kindness which the great Tupã really is and how to adore and worship Him.

If the French refuse thy daughters, it is not we who stop them; but we remind them instead they are sons of the great Tupã and in this quality they shall not disobey His commandments. Indeed, it is a very dishonest thing to prostitute thy daughters and them to give themselves to anyone, as they do. Well it is shown, in doing so, thou are sons of Jurupari. If thou wish therefore to scape the torments he prepares, it is vital to abandon all these damned customs and to obey the true children of Tupã.¹⁹

The missionary thus exposed his Christian doctrine of marriage to the Indian. The matrimony must be monogamous and indissoluble. Like the baptism, it was a sacrament, i.e., a way to become a son of the great Tupã. The mention of Tupã (God, in general language) and of Giropary (the Devil) showed that the missionary was trying to make the Indians understand that their salvation was in jeopardy. According to the missionary, the customs

¹⁹Claude d'Abbeville, *Histoire de la mission des Pères capucins en l'isle Maragnan et terres circonvoisines*, Paris, Imprimerie de Huby, 1614. Available in the website of the National Library of France, Gálica: <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k57399d>>, accessed in: March 2013, chapter XI: remarkable speech of Japy Ouassou leadre of the Island of Maranhão, and some questions of impostance we have made, p. 74v-75r.

which led the Indians to hell was the plurality of women and alliances. The choice of conversion implied the adoption of monogamy.

This Conversation about matrimony found in Claude d'Abbeville's chronicle suggested that the matrimony should constitute an important element in missionary interaction, a central theme in discussions between the priests and the Indians, a matter of incomprehension for both parts.

The missionary objective: the transformation of the Indian alliances into the Christian marriage

Alliance, prostitution, marriage, religious conversion, colonization and slavery. These are the terms used in these exchanges between missionaries and Indians on marital unions. Certainly, the missionary would expose the Christian marriage doctrine to the Indians as they would do with other themes of the catechism, but in the particular case of the matrimony, they would do something more than to teach and instruct what they considered the "truth", they would also observe and try to learn the practices of indigenous marital unions. Why the attention to the other in this specific matter?

Unlike those who remained in the surface, the missionary then tried to understand ("enter and exit") the rules of "nature", among these people "devoid of grace"

In fact, it was neither about curiosity, nor a special interest on the family, this attention to the indigenous marriage was coming from the necessity of the missionary to introduce Christian marriage among Indians. Indeed, the Christian doctrine establishes that the matrimony, according to the natural laws, existed among every men. This natural matrimony was a compromise of living a regular life, of having children. The theologians also believed that the rules of the matrimony vary according to the different societies which, most of the time, accept polygamy or the rejection, and the remarriage. The Christian matrimony would be, according to them, the full form of the perfect matrimony, monogamous and indissoluble.

The church which rose in the Roman Empire, which was a mosaic of different people, had to think since its origin, of the matrimony issue of the Pagans and the converted. The Church would not celebrate new marriages, since it would consider the marriages of the non Christian as the real ones. When the Pagans got converted, their matrimony would turn into a Christian marriage, through a simple blessing. In cases of polygamy, the first union was considered as the only true marriage. This was the same Christian doctrine, which was evoked to

transform the Indian marriages into Christian marriages. Because of those rules missionaries had special interest on the marital and family customs of the Indians.²⁰

The observation of the indigenous customs

In his treatise on indigenous customs, Yves d'Evreux dedicated several chapters to the indigenous family. Chapters 21 and 22 would describe the different phases of life for men and women, titled "Order and respect that Nature placed among the wild...", chapter 23 dealt with inbreeding. The Capuchin started a real research, not settling for the repetition of other French authors on the matter. He treated, especially, of the male convalescence period of the father during his children birth that hadn't been described with such precision by other sources.²¹ He observed the relation between war and matrimony: the men sought for the women matrimony when they were "good warriors to conquer. Polygamy was, in fact, reserved to the brave warriors who killed enemies in war, and the first marriage happened, for men, after the death of their first enemy.

The economic and social dimension of polygamy was also evoked by the Capuchin, who devoted a long analysis of the role of women in the Tupi society. It is "they [who] have the required experience to the life of the family": they planted seeds, weaved, cooked and "like the mules around there" carry luggage, a very important occupation in a semi-nomadic society. Yves d'Evreux came to the conclusion that "These Savages are extremely greedy for having so many women", for the prestige that it favors: "they are appreciated and estimated according to the number of women they have." Yves d'Evreux, reinforced yet that there was no dowry, nor a dowry to the marriage, but a compromise, by the son-in-law, to sustain his father-in-law. To prove that, the missionary transcribed excerpts, in direct style, of conversations between spouses, he gave the conditions for each stage of life and all the terms of the relationship, with great accuracy, distinguishing matrilinear and patrilinear relatives (the only one considered forbidden inbreeding), legitimate and illegitimate descendants (regarding unions with prisoners of war). All the data collected by the missionary were used in the 20th century by anthropologists of Tupi societies, as Florestan Fernandes, who counted on the description of Yves d'Evreux to build his theory of Tupi gerontocracy.²²

However, informations about the indigenous family are best comprehended when looking at the missionary dimension of the text. Yves d'Evreux did not simply observe the indigenous customs, he watched and

²⁰Charlotte de Castelneau L'Etoile, « Le mariage des infidèles au XVI^e siècle: doutes missionnaires et autorité pontificale », *Mélanges de l'Ecole Française de Rome Italie-Méditerranée*, 2009, n. 1, 2009, p. 95-121.

²¹Yves d'Evreux, *Voyage au Nord du Brésil*, edição F. Denis Paris, 1864, p. 89: « il se couche pour faire la gesine au lieu de sa femme, qui s'employe à son office coutumier, & lors toutes les femmes du village viennent le voir, le consolant sur la peine & la douleur qu'il a eu de faire cet enfant. ».

²²Florestan Fernandes presented his theory of gerontocracy in Chapter III « O sistema de parentesco », In: _____, *A organização social dos Tupinambá*, UnB, São Paulo, 1989 [1948].

interpreted them according to a missionary agenda of the transformation of indigenous marriage. By being a missionary and by intending to transform the indigenous matrimony, priest Yves tried to understand in depth the rules behind the family life of the Indians.²³ He himself explained his penetrating look over the matter, when compared to other observers:

how many people ignore, and have always done so, what I have told and what I am yet to tell, though they have spoken to them in several occasions, for not having comprehended or observed the beautiful behavior of nature on these people deprived of grace; and thus, stepped over these precious gems without taking any benefit and without realizing anything.²⁴

In this passage about the matrimony, there was a kind of self-definition of the missionary about the Indians. Like the ones he described as ignorant and who were, by contrast, travelers or interpreters, the missionary “chatted” to obtain information. The choice of the verb “chat” is interesting and it stands out from the verb “observe”, many times chosen in order to characterize the work of describing the customs. The terms referred back to these conversations in Tupi language between Yves d’Evreux and the Indians, which were the origin of the missionary knowledge. The knowledge of the missionary consisted on repeating what the Indians would tell him about their family organization.

Unlike those who remained in the surface, the missionary then tried to understand (“enter and exit”) the rules of “nature”, among these people “devoid of grace”. Yves d’Evreux explained here the missionary work, seeking to evaluate the indigenous unions in the terms of the natural law. The Tupi unions, which were not in accordance to the Christian laws (the Law of Grace), were, however, in accordance to the natural law. According to the interpretation of the missionary, God has imprinted the natural law in all men alike, and a natural “order and respect” can be observed in the rules of the unions of Tupi Indians. The Christians should indeed feel inspired: the gratitude by the elders, the work of the son-in-law to their father-in-law are exemplary for them.²⁵ The missionary said then that all Christian children should learn from the Tupi Indians “the true intelligence of the formal words of marriage: “thou shall leave thy father and thy mother”, by which God did not wish to say that marriage meant ingratitude towards the parents. The formula was impressive. It meant that even if the tupinambá Indians were polygamous and who did not have a moral view on sexuality (the Capuchin evokes his “pudency” repeatedly, to indicate that he is no longer in the front of the description) they were, in any case, examples in marriage. There was a true difference of

²³The same way, in Nova Caledônia, 20th century, the knowledge about kanak family by Leenhardt can be explained by the worry of the protestant shepard about the matrimony. Michel Naepels; Christine Salomon (eds.), *Terrains et destins de Maurice Leenhardt*, Paris, Éditions de l’École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2007.

²⁴Yves d’Evreux, *Voyage au Nord du Brésil*, edition F. Denis Paris, 1864, p. 86.

²⁵*Idem*, *Ibidem*, p. 83.

judgement related to the Jesuits of the 16th century, Who believed there was no natural marriage in the Tupi society because there was no sense of obligation between Tupi spouses, who could get break apart by the most futile of the reasons, without the spouses feeling bitter.

For Yves d'Evreux, there was a true matrimony (according to the natural Law) among the Tupi Indians, and the whole conception of Tupi family came from this subjacent judgement. This example in particular showed that a decontextualized reading of missionary sources in order to extract only the information about the Indians which the missionary might have registered, without comprehending them, can be impoverishing. [Understanding the challenges of the missionary interaction what could best interpret these sources] Neglecting the missionary point of view, which was to find equivalences between the indigenous unions and Christian matrimony, anthropologists have read textual descriptions of the indigenous marital customs too literally. To return to the example of Florestan Fernandes, the sociologist assumed the form of a catalogue of customs registered by the missionaries, ignoring the great debating on the existence or not of a natural matrimony among the Indians in Brazil. But he himself recognized the contradictions of these sources: in the section *Rules related to marriage and to the organization of the family*, he pointed out twice, the importance of the matrimony: "marriage is an institution of great importance in the sociocultural Tupinambá system."²⁶ The lack of contextualization of production of the missionary sources pinpointed that there were some conflicting information, without trying to explain the reasoning for such contradictions. He mentioned the difficulty to perceive the rules with clarity: [is there a favorite wife? Was there always a plurality of wives? He spoke of "occasional monogamy and polygamy", and concluded with this uncertainty:

I have the impression, however, based on the various possibilities of spouse choice, and on the fixing of a residence, that a wide sphere of the Tupinambás' family relations remains unknown.²⁷

It is interesting to notice that the sociologist, working with abundant missionary sources, did not question the basics (Why so many descriptions? What for?), getting to the conclusion that the Tupi parental system remained unknown. In fact, there was a devate among the missionaries on the true nature of the Indian marital unions.

Negotiations about marriage

The chronic of Yves d'Evreux contained not only a rich description of the indigenous system of kinship relations and alliances, but also it showed the transforming system by the presence of the missionaries. The second part of the chronicle was a "spiritual treaty", a report about the evangelization process. The theme of matrimony was in the center of the conversations between Indians and

²⁶Florestan Fernandes, *A organização social dos Tupinambá*, UnB, São Paulo, 1989 [1948], p. 183-212.

²⁷*Idem*, *Ibidem*.

missionaries, registered in this spiritual treaty. Yves explained, in chapter III of the spiritual treaty that the missionaries would demand from the adults two conditions in order to have them baptized: the knowledge of the Christian doctrine and renouncing from the plurality of spouses. Converting into Christianity meant abandoning polygamy: a process, undoubtedly, arduous to the Indians.

In the first chapter, where Yves d'Evreux showed the great enthusiasm by the Indians about the new religion, the abandoning of polygamy did not seem so difficult. In fact, the leaders said they wanted indeed to marry women from France, and that they wanted only one spouse: "I love a French woman with all my heart, I love her too much". However, the desire of marrying a woman from France, a powerful sign of prestige and a promise of wealth, was a form of utopia, a distant and hypothetical future, because the women from France were not there yet.

In concrete and individual cases, we feel that the change in the marital situation is delicate and it is a negotiation matter. Thus, Yves d'Evreux started out saying to Pacamont, the great "sorcerer" of Comma, [that he got there perched on the back of a strong woman and that he would like to "talk to Tupã"] that he should abandon his other thirty women. Pacamont turned, hesitantly.²⁸

The case was different with Martin, a Tapuitapera leader who accepted to renounce the plurality of women:

He replied that, as for the plurality of women, that it was something he had never approved of, and that it was more than reasonable that a man would have only one woman, but many of them to take care of the house. I told him then that he could have several women as servants, but not as wives, to what he easily agreed to.

Later on, Yves returned on the setting of Martin's marital status:

He also promised us to select one of his three wives, especially the one who was the mother of the child, in case she would wish to become a Christian as he would; as for the other two, he would keep them as servants. He fulfilled accurately those promises [...].²⁹

Martin is a model of the new Christian, he was the only adult, not in *hora mortis* to be baptized in the narrative of Yves d'Evreux. He, apparently, arranged his marital situation without difficulties. The emphasis of the text, that showed up twice in the episode, pointed out that this condition was absolutely necessary; the case of Martin was then an exception.

The conversion of the indigenous unions into Christian marriages was an authentic work for the missionaries in the field. Yves d'Evreux exposed, through the case of the baptism of a woman of the Tabajar tribe, the difficulties imposed by the transformation of the indigenous unions into Christian marriage.³⁰ A sick woman, affected by the preaching of the priests, asked for the baptism, which was granted because "everyone thought she would live no longer". Nothing represented better

²⁸Yves d'Evreux, *Voyage au Nord du Brésil*, édition F. Denis Paris, 1864, According to the treaty, chapter 16.

²⁹*Idem*, *Ibidem*, chapter 3.

³⁰Yves d'Evreux, *Voyage au Nord du Brésil*, édition F. Denis Paris, 1864 According to the treaty, chapter 2.

the prudence of the missionary than this sentence. However, once baptized, this woman has recovered her health, then the problem became to adjust her marital situation. According to Yves d'Evreux, the initiative came from the neophyte herself:

But one point would torment her, that she was wife of a Tabajara, who had two other women, so she could not live in marriage as required by the laws of Christianity.

Yves d'Evreux did not specify, for the readers, which were the "laws of Christianity" required for marriage they should know. The case of the Tabajara woman is complex for the missionary. The baptized woman kept married to the husband from the infidelity times, but her husband having other women, she would in fact be in a polygamous marriage. However, a polygamous relationship was not acceptable to the church.

To solve this kind of case, the missionaries resorted to the well-known canonical rule of the "Pauline Privilege,"³¹ which was one of the rare legal ways to break a non Christian wedding: "We remedy this by following the advice of Paulo." When a convert could no longer live with their non Christian spouse, who was preventing the first to live their religion, São Paulo (1 Cor. 7, 16) proposes the separation of the couple, giving the opportunity of the converted to remarry. The Pauline Privilege was the only case of dissolution (not annulment) of marriages authorized by the church. This complex canonical principle was explained by the French missionary to the Tabajara husband, whose perplexity is easy to be imagined:

So we sent to tell her husband that if he wanted to keep that wife, converted to Christianity, as the only one, moving away from the others, she would not leave him; but if instead he wanted to keep it as before, as a concubine, we and the great among French would allow her to leave, for being something incompatible with Christianity.

The Pauline Privilege was here modified by the political context. São Paulo had no intention of forcing a non Christian; the missionaries in the colonial situation adopted the speech of the restriction, evoking next to the missionaries ("we"), the temporary leaders of the colony ("The Great French"). The case was solved but with a certain resistance on the part of the husband: "The husband did not like it much, but finally agreed, and so she became a good Christian, staying with him as the only woman."

We see, by this example, how the matrimony was an essential and delicate matter among the missionary interactions. Although the missionaries, as Yves d'Evreux, would admire the organization of the indigenous family, the polygamy was a problem to the "conversion" into Christianity. It was because they could not solve the marital situation of the Indians within the Christian patterns that the missionaries would not dare to baptize and, for the Indians, the Christian monogamous and indissoluble marriage were an obstacle. Adopting the belief in Tupã, since we saw he was quite

³¹G. Oesterlé, *Privilegio Paulino*, em R. Naz (dir.), *Dictionnaire de Droit canonique*, Paris, Letouzey et Anet, 1935-1965, vol. VII, Paris, 1965, p. 230-280.

an attractive figure in this atmosphere of uncertainty and danger, was easier than becoming monogamous.

In the case of this Tabajara woman, the missionaries had to resort to the legal exception (the privilege) to solve the marital status situation. From the missionary point of view, it was accident, somehow, because the woman should have died after receiving the baptism. This episode revealed the complexity of the real situations and the conflicting matrimony dimensions.

For the Indians, the abandonment of polygamy meant the loss of social status and economic wealth. Also in the symbolic level, they are deprived of their unions, which were connected to the enemies' vengeance. The transition to monogamy, in which we saw the missionaries would set pre-requirements to the baptism, had many consequences for the Indians. Yves d'Évreux evoked, openly or between the lines, the reluctance of the Indian towards this new kind of union. The fact that most of the leaders would prefer to let their children in the hands of the missionaries, instead of converting them themselves, was, likely, a way to avoid "the laws of Christianity" referring to marriage. The children, young adults, were not yet polygamous, since the "try to get a wife" would not start before 25 years of age.

Thus, far from being a monotonous narrative about the evangelization process,³² the chronicles of the Capuchin priests, Yves d'Évreux and Claude d'Abbeville, narrated the process of missionary interaction, a discontinuous and faltering process, where Indians and missionaries would observe, evaluate and discuss among each other. If the Indians were attracted to the all mighty figure of Tupã, they were less inclined to the monogamy demanded by the priests. Marriage was understood, by every one, as a fundamental stone of the new society which was being built. For the missionaries, the Indians should adopt the Christian marriage to build a new Christian society. For the Indians, the attention given by the White to Christian matrimony was a sign of the uncertainties of new times.

The missionary sources did not only contain knowledge accumulated by the missionary about the Indians, but they reflect the interaction between the missionaries and the Indians. They were not only description of the original indigenous culture, which the anthropologists can collect after the removal of superfluous missionary elements; they showed this indigenous culture in the process of transformation and adaptation. It would be useless to try to unravel, in these conversations, what would have been authentically indigenous or what would have been purely missionary. The traces of these interactions informed us about the two present actors, Indians and missionary, their strategies of mutual recognition and of appropriation in a context of power relations and uncertainty.

³²The term is borrowed from Hélène Clastres in her preface to the edition of the Relation of Yves d'Évreux [Voyage au Nord du Brésil fait en 1613 et 1614, présentation et notes d'Hélène Clastres, Paris, Payot, 1985], where she suppresses a great part of the spiritual deal which she judges uninteresting. I analyzed the ambiguous relation of the anthropologists with the missionary sources in the article « De l'observation à la conversation: le savoir sur les Indiens du Brésil dans l'œuvre d'Yves d'Évreux », In: Charlotte de Castelneau-L'Estoile; Marie-Lucie Copete; Aliocha Maldavsky; Ines G. Zupanov, *Missions d'évangélisation et Circulation des Savoirs XVIe-XVIIIe siècles*, vol. 114, Madrid, Casa de Velázquez, Coleção da Casa de Velázquez, 2011, p. 269-294.