

Dimensions of indigenous freedom: Missions in Paraguay, 17-18th centuries¹

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Abstract

Despite being considered as free individuals in the Spanish empire, the natives had a specific statute which put them in a subordinate position in the hierarchy of the colonial society. They were legally connected to their communities, created or reformulated in the process of building the State in America. Such communities were forced to provide services to the King, which meant a series of obligations on its inhabitants. The connection to the communities and the obligations resulting from it, at times, represented an obstacle for the conduct of their personal projects and ambitions. By analyzing the missions of Paraguay and the interactions of its inhabitants with the colonial society in the South border of America, I intend to analyze how the natives perceived their different statute – being free, however, with several restrictions – and to demonstrate which strategies they used to achieve their own goals.

Keywords: natives; missions of Paraguay; freedom.

Dimensões da liberdade indígena: missões do Paraguai, séculos XVII-XVIII

Resumo

Apesar de serem considerados livres no conjunto do Império espanhol, os índios possuíam um estatuto específico, que os colocava em uma situação subordinada na hierarquia da sociedade colonial. Eles eram vinculados juridicamente às suas comunidades, criadas ou reformuladas no processo de construção do Estado na América. Tais comunidades deveriam prestar serviços ao monarca e significavam uma série de obrigações aos seus habitantes. O vínculo às comunidades e as obrigações daí advindas, muitas vezes, representavam um entrave para a realização dos seus projetos e ambições pessoais. Analisando as missões do Paraguai e as interações dos seus habitantes com a sociedade colonial na fronteira sul da América, pretendo problematizar como os índios percebiam o seu estatuto diferenciado – livre, porém com várias restrições – e demonstrar quais estratégias empregavam para atingir os seus próprios objetivos.

Palavras-chave: índios; missões do Paraguai; liberdade.

Dimensiones de la libertad indígena: misiones del Paraguay en los siglos XVII-XVIII

Resumen

A pesar de lo facto que los indios eran considerados libres en el conjunto de lo Imperio español, ellos tenían un estatuto específico que los posicionaba en una situación subordinada en jerarquía de la sociedad colonial. Ellos fueron vinculados jurídicamente a sus comunidades, creadas o reformuladas en el proceso de construcción del Estado en América. Esas comunidades deberían proveer servicios al monarca y significaban una serie de obligaciones a sus habitantes. Lo vínculo a las comunidades y sus obligaciones, muchas veces, representaban una traba para realizar proyectos y ambiciones personales. Analizando las misiones del Paraguay y las interacciones de sus habitantes con la sociedad colonial en la frontera de Sul del América, pretendo problematizar como los indios notaban su estatuto diferenciado – libre, con diversas restricciones – y demostrar cuales estrategias aplicaban para atingir sus propios objetivos.

Palabras-clave: indios; misiones del Paraguay; libertad.

Dimensions de la liberté des Indiens: missions du Paraguay, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles

Résumé

Bien que considérés comme libres dans l'empire espagnol, l'indiens avait un statut spécial qui les mettrait dans une position subalterne dans la hiérarchie de la société coloniale. Ils étaient légalement liés à ses communautés, créés ou reformulés dans la construction de l'État en Amérique. Ces communautés devaient assurer des services au monarque, donc les habitants avait des obligations. Le lien aux communautés et obligations ont souvent représenté obstacles à leur projets et ambitions personnelles. Avec l'analyse des missions du Paraguay et des interactions de ses habitants avec la société coloniale dans la frontière sud de l'Amérique, on a l'intention de discuter comme les indiens percevaient leur statut différencié – libre, toutefois avec plusieurs restrictions – et de décrire les stratégies qu'ils employaient pour atteindre leurs objectifs.

Mots-clés: indiens; missions du Paraguay; liberté.

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In the 1540s, a group of natives who lived in Seville, in an irregular captivity situation, was freed according to the laws in force back then. At that time, the Spanish employees involved in the case were caught off guard: the natives refused to go back to America. They argued that, by being free, they could choose and, therefore, they preferred to stay where they were. Among the reasons listed for the choice, one of them was the salary: they claimed that, in Seville, they earned more for the week's work than they would earn in a year in America. Besides, they added they felt safer in Europe.²

The case, narrated by Anthony Pagden in *La caída del hombre natural*, brings up some issues concerning the jurisdictional statute of the natives and their ambivalent relations with the Spanish empire. In articles published in the 1970s, Karen Spalding mentioned the importance of considering the origin of the term "native". Despite being free, they would still have a subordinate position in the American society, the colonial statute of which was derived from the establishment of a hierarchy, between the conqueror and the conquered populations, based on ethnical and cultural differences.³ Natives were classified as "conquered people", which, in the process of building the colonial society, was adjudicated to specific communities. Essentially, it was a jurisdictional definition which, at the beginning of contacts, also presented strong elements of cultural variation.

With time, the radical cultural variation that existed between both groups became weaker. Both groups began to share the codes of the Ibero-American world — built collectively, even if they had conflicting ideas and were asymmetric in nature. The maintenance of the static classification clearly had political purposes: from the perspective of the Crown and the groups and institutions involved in the establishment of a colonial hierarchy, it served as an instrument to perpetuate the differences and make sure that the Spanish would dominate America.⁴

On the other hand, till recently, both History and Anthropology employed a very essentialist point of view to define the natives, very different from the meaning that such classification has acquired historically, including from the perspective of the natives themselves. Peter Gow, in a study about *piros* (native population) in contemporary Peru, demonstrates how that population preferred to be known as 'mestiza' and civilized to the detriment of valuing the supposed ethnic purity. According to the author, *piros* acted like this expecting to be more able to deal with the surrounding majority society, unlike their ancestors, whose faith had been slavery or other forms of exploitation.⁵

²Anthony Pagden, *La caída del hombre natural. El indio americano y los orígenes de la etnología comparativa*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1988, p. 60.

³Karen Spalding, "¿Quiénes son los indios?", In: _____, *De indio a campesino*, Lima, Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1974, p. 147-193.

⁴*Idem*, *Ibidem*, Juan Carlos Estenssoro, *Del Paganismo a la Santidad. La incorporación de los indios del Perú al catolicismo. 1532-1750*, Lima, Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, 1998; Jacques Poloni-Simard, *El mosaico indígena: movilidad, estratificación social y mestizaje en el corregimiento de Cuenca (Ecuador) del siglo XVI al XVIII*, Quito, Abya-Yala, 2006.

⁵Peter Gow, *Of Mixed Blood: Kinship and History in Peruvian Amazonia*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991.

Like the *piros* in the Peru of the 20th century or the natives who were set free in Seville in the 16th century, the reaction of the native population facing the surrounding majority was much different from the mere attempt to keep what would be their “traditional” values.⁶

In this article, I plan to discuss how the natives understood the different meanings of their jurisdictional condition in the colonial world and how it could limit the accomplishment of their individual wishes, considering the population connected to Jesuit reductions in Paraguay as reference. Such aspects allow us to better realize the meaning of the actions of those natives involved in the missionary experience. Conflicts arising in those spaces were not only motivated by merely religious aspects, but were also directly related to the dynamics of the surrounding majority society.

For most of the available bibliography, reductions in Paraguay would be a successful example of colonial isolation policies for the natives. Such success would be directly related with the other options available for this population: facing the possibility of providing services to the owners, who were the colonists established in Asuncion and surroundings, or being transformed into slaves by the *bandeirantes*. Hence, the natives chose a life in the missions together with Jesuits. This perspective is directly related to the conjecture of the mid 17th century, since many natives were involved with the construction of the missions in search of some safety against the threat of slavery or *encomienda*.⁷ However, in the 18th century, the social dynamics of the region had changed considerably. The cities that were closer to the missions had grown and many natives had learned crafts in order to survive in urban centers. Their jurisdictional freedom, at that point, was relatively consolidated.

Recently, certain aspects of life inside the Jesuit reductions have been reconsidered by historians and anthropologists, who have been accompanying the still little renovation of historiography in relation to the missionary practice.⁸ For the specific case of the missions of Paraguay, the homogeneity of the Indian village population, the presence of non-Christian groups as well as political and religious tensions in

⁶For a general picture on theoretical-methodological matters in studies about natives and the resulting criticism, especially from the mid 1980s on, see, veja-se: Guillaume Boccara, *Mundos Nuevos en las Fronteras del Nuevo Mundo: Relectura de los Procesos Coloniales de Etnogénesis, Etnificación y Mestizaje en Tiempos de Globalización*, *Mundo Nuevo Nuevos Mundos*, revista eletrônica, Paris. Available in: <www.ehess.fr/cerma.Revuedebates.htm>. Acesso em: 15 de julho de 2010; John Monteiro, “Entre o etnocídio e a etnogênese: identidades indígenas coloniais”, In: _____. *Tupis, tapuias e historiadores: estudos de história indígena e do indigenismo*. Tese apresentada ao concurso de livre docência no Departamento de Antropologia da Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, 2001, p. 53-78.

⁷There is extensive bibliography on the establishment of the missions in Paraguay in the 17th century and the conflicts involving the *bandeirantes*. Among them, see: Magnus Morner, *Actividades políticas y económicas de los jesuitas en el Río de la Plata*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 1968; John Monteiro, *Negros da terra: índios e bandeirantes nas origens de São Paulo*, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 1994.

⁸For a critical posture about the dominant subject in historiography about the missions, see: David Sweet, “The Ibero-American Frontier Mission in Native American History”, In: Erick Langer; Robert Jackson, *The New Latin American Mission History*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1995; Salvador Bernabéu, “La invención del Gran Norte ignaciano: la historiografía sobre la Compañía de Jesús entre dos centenarios (1992-2006)”, In: _____. (coord.), *El Gran Norte Mexicano*, Sevilla, CSIC, 2009.

the region etc., have been presented in studies.⁹ However, the impressions of the natives about the community regime and their expectations about life outside the *pueblos* still have not been analyzed thoroughly by historiography. In general, the authors do not consider the contacts with different segments in the colonial society, including those carried out in urban centers, as elements that form their vision of the world. If the matter has been little analyzed by the historians, it did not pass unnoticed for the Jesuits themselves. As we will see, religious men continuously perceived the contacts kept outside the *pueblos* as the origin of behaviors they considered to be inadequate. As explained by the provincial father, Thomas de Baeja, in 1682, the natives left the missions, “by entering the Spanish *pueblos*, and sometimes among the infidels, in whose school they learn bad manners.”¹⁰

Out of indifference, tolerance or interest, it was relatively easy to find Spanish people in America to whom it seemed that people, including natives, could choose how and with whom to live

The contacts with the surrounding majority society took place in several occasions, because natives played an essential role in the colonial life of *Río de la Plata*. As in other regions of America, they were deployed in public constructions in the region and in defense against the increasing Portuguese expansionist intentions, especially the ones involving Colônia do Sacramento.¹¹ When performing such activities, the natives spent long periods away from the *pueblos*. In such occasions, they established relations with other members of the colonial world and compared their condition to that of other vassals of the Spanish King.

Besides these official activities, many natives also abandoned the missions, individually or in small groups, motivated by expectations of a better life. Some stayed close to their *pueblos*, others chose the cities in the region. Certainly, what they found there ranged according to a series of items: their different skills, conjecture, gender, and, of course, luck.

Law and practices

Several sources point out at the constant escapes of natives and the initiatives of different colonial authorities trying to solve this “problem”. As

⁹Elisa Frühauf García, *As diversas formas de ser Índio: políticas indígenas e políticas indigenistas no extremo sul da América portuguesa*, Rio de Janeiro, Arquivo Nacional, 2009; Guillermo Wilde, *Religión y poder en las misiones de guaraníes*, Buenos Aires, SB, 2009.

¹⁰Biblioteca Nacional de España. Cartas de los PP. Generales y Provinciales de la Compañía de Jesús a los misioneros jesuitas del Paraguay, Uruguay y Paraná [Manuscritos], s.XVIII. Localización: Mss/6976. Carta del Padre Provincial Thomas de Baeja de 15 de abril de 1682, p. 118.

¹¹Eduardo Neumann, *O trabalho guarani missioneiro no Rio da Prata colonial, 1640-1750*, Porto Alegre, Martins Livreiro, 1996.

forementioned, it is important to emphasize that natives were connected to the community regime and, therefore, their mobility officially depended on the authorization of the Jesuits and the administration of the *pueblos* which were comprised of natives called 'leaders'. Hence, in case they were outdoors without permission and were denounced, they could legally be forced to return to their reductions of origin.

However, it was not easy to apply the colonial legislation: as pointed out by several authors, in order to recognize the jurisdictional condition of a person, that is, his or her quality, it was important to consider a series of criteria that could be handled relatively easily. Besides the phenotype, aspects like clothing, shoes, haircut, beard and the domain of the Spanish language were essential to go from one quality to the other.¹² The Jesuits themselves, despite the considerable experience acquired in missionary activities, sometimes could not state if the individuals involved in certain situations were natives or Spanish. At a certain time, in 1708, when testifying against the murders committed by a group of infidels, religious men could not inform the quality of the victims: according to them, they could be either Spanish or their commended natives, since they had long hair and beard.¹³

On the other hand, the legal and religious principles were not always represented in social dynamics. After all, the American world was not homogeneous: many Spanish people did not agree with the projects of the Jesuits and the Crown, that is, they did not care for the maintenance of the community regime and the different statute for the natives. Some of them did not even consider the evangelization of the natives to be necessary. As pointed out by Stuart Schwartz, out of indifference, tolerance or interest, it was relatively easy to find Spanish people in America to whom it seemed that people, including natives, could choose how and with whom to live.¹⁴

As to the natives who chose to remain with the infidels in the region known as *campanha*, the area that divided the Iberian empires to the South of America with little presence of agents of both States, ended up being benefitted by Spanish indigenous policies. The *Recopilación de Leyes de Indias* strictly forbade any type of war with the infidels just to make them convert into the Catholic belief, or yet to force their submission to the Spanish people.¹⁵

¹²About the relationship between "racial" classifications and colonial legislation, the study by Magnus Morner is still an essential reference: Magnus Morner, *La mezcla de razas en la historia de América Latina*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 1969. [For the analysis of the different meanings of miscegenation, see: Joanne Rappaport, "Quem é mestiço? - decifrando a mistura racial no Novo Reino de Granada, séculos XVI e XVII", *Varia Historia*, vol. 25, n. 41, jan./jun. 2009.

¹³Biblioteca Nacional (Rio de Janeiro) - Coleção de Angelis: doc. Nº 543/ I- 29, 3, 70, microfilme: MS 508 (22). Autos de las hostilidades de los indios guenoas contra los guaraníes. 1708.

¹⁴Stuart Schwartz, *Cada um na sua lei*, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2009.

¹⁵*Recopilación de Leyes de Indias*, libro 3º., título 4º., leis 8 a 10. Disponível em: <<http://www.congreso.gob.pe/ntley/LeyIndiaP.htm>>. Acesso em: 03 de março de 2012. About the discussion concerning the natives' statute in the Spanish Empire and its theoretical and practical consequences, see: Lewis Hanke, *Aristóteles e os índios americanos*, São Paulo, Martins Editora, s/d. e Anthony Pagden, *La caída del hombre natural. El indio americano y los orígenes de la etnología comparativa*, Madri, Alianza Editorial, 1988. For the policies related to the natives in the frontiers, with emphasis on the 18th century, see: David Weber, *Bárbaros. Los españoles y sus salvajes en la era de la ilustración*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2007.

It is true that the law did not apply to the natives who had been Christianized: in case they escaped to such areas, they would be considered as rebels and punished without major legal obstacles. However, there was once again the dilemma of classifications: in case they were with the infidels, it would be hard to tell one from the other.

Besides, the precarious colonial government and its mutable relationship with non-subject natives, which ranged from dependency to alliance, enmity and open conflicts, made any kind of effective action even more difficult. Buenos Aires, even after becoming the capital of the newly-created vice-kingdom of *Río de la Plata*, in 1776, was very close to the territory of several groups of non-subject natives.¹⁶ In general, administrators did not want problems with them: often, Jesuits tried to get help to implement actions against the infidels, and received no as an answer.¹⁷

Therefore, being aware of the obstacles for the effective punishment for the escapees and motivated by the expectations to fulfill their objectives, many natives left, temporarily or permanently, their respective *pueblos*. Some of them, as aforementioned, chose the closest cities of the region, such as Buenos Aires, Asuncion and Santa Fé. Others went to more distant places, like urban centers in Peru or Portuguese dominions.

New horizons

Recently, the presence of the natives in the cities has attracted the attention of historians, who have observed different aspects of the migration: such as economic activities, gender-related differences, and acquisition of new cultural instruments, among others. As mentioned by Felipe Castro Gutiérrez, the surveillance in the cities was generally not strict and allowed the natives to go through experiences that would be reprehensible in their *pueblos* of origin.¹⁸

Despite the occasional lack of surveillance, cities had specific legislation aiming to regulate the actions of their inhabitants and restrict the presence and activities of the natives. In Buenos Aires, where most of the natives were heading to, many groups were sent back by the governors in a bid to prevent the

¹⁶David Weber, *Bárbaros*. Los españoles y sus salvajes en la era de la ilustración, Barcelona, Crítica, 2007.

¹⁷Elisa Frühauf García, "Entre a intolerância e a indiferença: classificações religiosas, fronteiras étnicas e políticas coloniais (Rio da Prata, século XVIII)", no prelo.

¹⁸Felipe Castro Gutiérrez, "Los indios y la ciudad. Panorama y perspectivas de investigación", In: ____ (coord.), *Los indios y las ciudades de Nueva España*, México, D.F., Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2010, p. 24. About natives in the cities, there is the precursor chapter "La ciudad" by Charles Gibson, *Los aztecas bajo el dominio español, 1519-1810*, México, D.F., Siglo Veintiuno, 1967, p. 377-412. Among the most recent work, see: Jacques Poloni-Simard, *El mosaico indígena: movilidad, estratificación social y mestizaje en el corregimiento de Cuenca (Ecuador) del siglo XVI al XVIII*, Quito, Abya-Yala, 2006; Marta Zambrano, *Trabajadores, villanos y amantes: encuentros entre indígenas y españoles en la ciudad letrada. Santa Fe de Bogotá (1550-1650)*, Bogotá, Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, 2008.

commerce promoted by these migrating native women on the streets. It was also to forbid and stop the natives from buying alcohol and weapons.¹⁹

The importance of such restrictions certainly varied: in general, they were not taken so seriously, but in other cases they could be severely applied, as in the case of the native Clemente Marín, who faced problems for possessing a gun.²⁰ Getting punished or not, the existence of restrictions and the awareness as to the lifestyle of the other members of the colonial society certainly raised some issues among the natives in relation to the community regime and its consequences.

In the mid-1750s, for instance, a native from the *pueblo* San Tomé, who had escaped to Buenos Aires, exposed his point of view about the differences between the lives of natives in reductions and those of Spanish people in the city. He was a musician and seemed to have earned a reasonable social and economic status. He frequently played in balls and according to him, he had a very fun life. He then decided to write a letter to his fellow citizens, classified by the Jesuit Doming Muriel as “a bunch of nonsense words”. In the missive, written in the mid 18th century, the native called the ones in the missions as “barbarians and idiots” for putting up with the moderate and, from his point of view, very peaceful life of the reductions. He advised all of them to follow the “example” of the Spanish: to have a joyful life, “the disorder and the vice”.²¹

It seems that the native from San Tomé was not alone: the functioning of the regime in the *pueblos* was not pleasant to the lives of a considerable part of the inhabitants, especially due to the fact that they enjoyed few material benefits. After being in touch with the colonial society, many natives had desires in relation to a series of goods to which they had no access in the missions. At the late 1720s, Ignacio de Arteaga said that the natives who had escaped did not want to go back to their *pueblos*. They claimed that, despite working constantly, they did not earn enough to buy the goods they wished to buy.²² As it seems, the desire for European goods was common among these natives. Some decades after this report, when the Jesuits were expelled, Spanish administrators informed that the *pueblos* were about to fail, especially due to excessive expenses with goods considered to be superficial. Now that they could buy with-

¹⁹Real Academia de la Historia - Colección Mata Linares: Bando del Gobernador de Buenos Aires D. José de Andonaegui ordenando que salgan de la ciudad vagos, holgazanes y maleantes; que no lleven armas prohibidas; que no anden con caballos por la noche; a qué hora han de cerrar las tiendas; que ninguna india, mulata o negra vendan en la calle a partir de la oración; que ninguna persona saque de la ciudad vacas y trigo; que los extranjeros salgan de la ciudad. Buenos Aires, 6 de diciembre de 1745. Copia, 3ff. 32 cms. T.II, ff41-43; Bando de D. Diego de Salas, Gobernador Interino del Río de la Plata, prohibiendo el uso de armas vedadas; no se compren esclavos a criados, sólo a los dueños; los pulperos no vendan armas, aguardiente y vino a los indios. Buenos Aires, 14 de abril de 1763. Copia, 2ff. 32 cms. T.II, ff154-155.

²⁰Real Academia de la Historia - Colección Mata Linares: Disposición de D. Diego de Salas, Gobernador Interino del Río de la Plata, acerca de la ejecución del castigo del indio Clemente Marín por el uso de armas prohibidas. Buenos Aires, 15 de abril de 1763. Copia, 1f. 32 cms. T.II, f156.

²¹Domingo Muriel, *Historia del Paraguay, desde 1747 hasta 1767*, Madrid, Suárez, 1919, p. 322-323.

²²Ignacio de Arteaga a los PP. Misioneros. Yapeyú, 6 de agosto de 1727 *apud* Martín Morales, “Los diarios de la transigración y de la guerra guaranítica de Tadeo Enis y Bernardo Nusdorffer (1752-1756). Invitación a la lectura”, *In: Karl Kohut; María Cristina Torales Pacheco (eds.), Desde los confines de los imperios ibéricos: los jesuitas de habla alemana en las misiones americanas*, Frankfurt am Main, Vervuert; Madri, Iberoamericana, 2007, p. 220.

out being supervised by the Jesuits, the natives spent most of their earnings on shoes and fans, according to the impressions of don Carlos José de Añasco.²³

However, not all of them demonstrated so much appreciation for material goods: some valued the possibility to utilize their time as they wished, seemingly exercising what they called freedom. In 1747, the Ignatian José Cardiel got in touch with *guaranis* who had escaped from the missions and lived with the *charruas*, classified as infidels. These *guaranis* were not isolated; on the contrary, they interacted with the colonial society, especially when working seasonally for the owners of local cattle. During these encounters, the religious man invited them back into their missions. The *guaranis* answered that their lives there had not been pleasant, since they were forced to work with punishment, and they thought they were better off in the colonial society now, “being free to change owners and land whenever they liked”.²⁴

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The association between Christian life and excessive work was common in the region, hence revealing that conflicts were not necessarily related to religious matters *per se*. At the late 18th century, the Portuguese astronomer José de Saldanha asked the *minuanos* natives why they would not accept to be baptized. Saldanha argued that there were not many obstacles for that, since they were continuously in touch with the Portuguese, and their lifestyle was not much different from other segments of the colonial society. The natives’ answer was honest: “Christians worked hard to have something to eat and wear, and they [the *minuanos*], with their current lifestyle, would go through life with more rest”.²⁵

Love and gender: Perspectives

Besides the expectations of enjoying time with more freedom, or obtaining material benefits as a result of their work, love and sexual matters were also a

²³Biblioteca Nacional (Rio de Janeiro) – Coleção de Angelis, MS-508 (26), doc.758. Informe sobre la decadencia de los pueblos de misiones, por don Carlos José de Añasco. Ciudad de las Corrientes, 26 de marzo de 1778.

²⁴Carta y relación de las Misiones de la Provincia del Paraguay. Padre José Cardiel, S.J. Buenos Aires, diciembre 20 de 1747. *apud* Diego Bracco, *Charruas, guenoas y guaranies. Interacción y destrucción: indígenas en el Río de la Plata*, Montevidéo, Linardi y Risso, 2004, p. 277.

²⁵José de Saldanha, “Diário resumido e histórico” [1787], *In: Anais da Biblioteca Nacional*, vol. 51, Rio de Janeiro, Biblioteca Nacional, 1938, p. 236.

very conflicting element in the natives' lives. They created tensions inside the missions and encouraged men and women to escape.

Jesuits were very committed to the imposing of monogamy and the sacrament of matrimony among the natives. Their behavior led to conflicts, which, eventually, jeopardized the permanence of natives in the missions. There is one suggestive case that took place in the mid-1730s, which was already analyzed by some authors. At the time, a group of natives abandoned some reductions in Paraguay and formed their own *pueblo*, which was very similar to the missions: there was a church, a ceremonial and even a native who played certain roles of priests. Unlike the reductions, however, male polygamy was allowed in the new *pueblo*.²⁶

This case illustrates a matter that has been well explored by bibliography: the difficulties found by the missionaries to impose the Catholic matrimony, which was in contrast with the different habits and sexual and love desires of the natives, generically entitled with a polygamy system. Changes coming from the inclusion in a colonial society, however, were deeper: they meant the construction of new gender roles that were part of the social life aspect.²⁷

In reductions, it was important that marriages were celebrated as early as possible, and there were also mechanisms to try and control the relationships between men and women. They should be separated from childhood and, after they grew up, the policy was that different physical, social and economic spaces were occupied according to gender.²⁸ Generally, many of the expectations of the Jesuits in relation to female natives were not different from the general perceptions of the Iberian world towards women.²⁹

A significant space to put the policy into practice in relation to female natives was a sort of refuge, called *cotiguazú* in *guarani*. Besides working as a shelter for the orphans and widows, women demonstrating "some vice or fragility concerning their honesty and fidelity" should also be sent there, especially in the absence of their husbands, hoping they would abandon their "scandalous" life.³⁰ Control, however, was not easy: according to certain testimonies, separating the female and male natives was not enough to avoid

²⁶Guillermo Wilde, *Religión y poder en las misiones de guaraníes*, Buenos Aires, SB, 2009, p. 125 *et seq.*

²⁷Despite approaching the 19th century, Laura Peers points out some matters concerning the conflicts between female natives and Jesuits, especially as to their participation in the political administration of the community. Laura Peers, "The Guardian of All: Jesuit Missionary and Salish Perceptions of the Virgin Mary", *In*: Jennifer Brown; Elizabeth Vibert (eds.), *Reading beyond words: contexts for native history*, Toronto, Broadview Press, 2003, p. 217-236.

²⁸About the Jesuits' policies in relation to female natives in the missions of Paraguay, see: Jean Baptista, *O Temporal*, São Miguel das Missões, RS, Museu das Missões, 2009, p. 75 *et seq.*; Eliane Cristina Deckmann Fleck, "De mancebas auxiliares do demônio a devotas congregantes: mulheres e condutas em transformação (reduções jesuítico-guaranis, séc. XVII)", *Revista Estudos Feministas*, vol. 14, n. 3, dez. 2006, p. 617-634; María Elena Imolesi, "El sistema misional en jaque: la reclusión femenina en las reducciones jesuíticas de guaraníes", *Anos 90*, vol. 18, n. 34, Porto Alegre, dez. 2011, p. 139-158.

²⁹About the subject, see: Isabel Morant (dir.); Margarita Ortega; Asunción Lavrin; Pilar Pérez Cantó (coods.), *Historia de las mujeres en España y América Latina*, Vol. II: *El mundo moderno*, Madrid, Cátedra, 2005.

³⁰Real Academia de la Historia - Colección Mata Linares. Tomo VIII, 9/1663. Capítulo del informe que D. Manuel Antonio de la Torre, Obispo de Paraguay, dio al Rey sobre una visita a las Misiones de los PP. Jesuitas, fl.131.

“temptations”. They could behave “inappropriately” with each other, according to a very obscure observation from Montoya.³¹

As in the case of applying the colonial legislation, the reductions also maintained a considerable distance between the rules in force and the social practices. The documents produced by the Jesuits indicate that the margin of maneuver was considerable in the missionary space, as observed in the discussions about the punishments imposed upon female natives. Usually, the attempt to control them by means of punishments in public did not cause the expected effects. Those who watched such scenes started to speculate about the motives behind such punishments, commenting on the statement “What is not public is not solid”, thus creating embarrassing situations.

In order to avoid slander and its dire consequences, priest Andres de Rada recommended a more discerning posture from the missionaries.³² Such recommendation was confirmed by the mail written by provincial priests: Jesuits were advised to adopt a political perspective rather than a strictly moral or theological one concerning the “problems” related to the behavior of female natives. Before punishing for the crimes considered as serious, they should always consult with their superiors, suggesting that, in some cases, it would be better to ignore them than to use an explicit punishment. Possibly, many Jesuits over-punished the natives, because provincial priests also tried to avoid some practices that were apparently common, such as cutting the women’s hair. Harm coming from such acts was excessive, and could jeopardize some pillars of the missionary experience, like marriage: if native females were “married, their husbands were upset over them, and if they were single, they lose the opportunity of their marriages”.³³

The existence of explicit rules and the perception of the matter that considers which would be the current practices among the natives, before they entered the missions, at times overshadowed the understanding of the actions of female natives: many of them escaped or tried to fulfill their social and sexual needs in these spaces. From the contacts with the colonial society, they probably began to consider other possibilities, which not necessarily were similar to the ones of the male natives. On the contrary, conflicts involving men and women were constant, especially in situations involving the interaction with other agents that were present in that region. In the 1750s, during the attempts to establish the Treaty of Madrid, the natives were suspicious and troubled by the proximity between female natives and Iberian soldiers. Those who were married accused their wives of “bad life”, and the consequences embarrassed all of those who were involved.

³¹Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, *Catecismo de la lengua guaraní*, Asunción, Centro de Estudios Paraguayos “Antonio Guasch”, 2011 [1640], p. 346.

³²Biblioteca Nacional de España. Cartas de los PP. Generales y Provinciales de la Compañía de Jesús a los misioneros jeuitas del Paraguay, Uruguay y Paraná [Manuscritos], s.XVIII. Localización: Mss/6976. Carta del Padre Visitador y Vice Provincial Andres de Rada de 13 de abril de 1664, p. 22.

³³Biblioteca Nacional de España. Cartas de los PP. Generales y Provinciales de la Compañía de Jesús a los misioneros jeuitas del Paraguay, Uruguay y Paraná [Manuscritos], s.XVIII. Localización: Mss/6976. Carta comum a todas las doctrinas del Padre Christoval Gomez Provincial desta Provincia su fecha desta doctrina de Santiago 4 de junio de 1675, p. 93.

The governor of Montevideo, José Joaquim de Viana, who apparently ignored the opinions of the Jesuits mentioned above on the subject, publicly ordered to cut the hair of the female natives. The attitude of the governor did not please anyone: they felt humiliated and the punishment seemed to be disproportionate in their husbands' opinion.³⁴ According to the records, Iberian men felt attracted to the female natives, and the latter usually used personal relationships as a resource to reach their objectives. In the early 19th century, Auguste de Saint-Hilaire stated that "a crowd of white men fell in love with them". And, if we believe in his words, it seems that female natives were not indifferent to such passions. Saint-Hilaire also said that "they gave themselves to the men of their race out of duty, to the white men out of interest, and to the blacks out of pleasure."³⁵

Journeys, knowledge and political empowerment

The choice to leave the *pueblos*, however, was complicated: not all of them found what they were looking for. For many reasons — disappointments, longings, needs — many of them came back and told others about their impressions of the world. The cultural instruments acquired in such journeys made them stronger, and provided them with better understanding about the colonial society and, eventually, to politically face the Jesuits. One of the main acquired skills was the domain of the Spanish language, especially because it represented a possibility to directly access the Spanish world, without the mediation of the Jesuits.

Joanne Rappaport explained the contemporaneous leaderships of *Paez* (native people) in Colombia and demonstrated that most of their eminent leaders spent a significant part of their lives away from the communities. In this period, they gathered the necessary instruments to deal with the surrounding majority society. In their communities, such knowledge gave them a vision of power, made their skills concrete, which were superior to the skills of the others, to handle the negotiations of the State bureaucracy.³⁶

Missionaries realized that the contact with the colonial society changed the natives. In 1678, the provincial priest Diego Altamirano claimed that, after dealing with the Spanish, they became more "malicious".

The risks for this small cattle are not fewer, every day they become more numerous, while the malice is more recognized in the natives for dealing with the Spanish, and for dealing with politics we see them leaning towards the evil that, with deep sorrow, are found in

³⁴Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Brasil-Limites, cx.2, doc.133. Carta de Gomes Freire de Andrade a dom Pedro de Cevallos. Forte de Jesus-Maria-José, 14 de dezembro de 1757.

³⁵Auguste de Saint-Hilaire, *Viagem ao Rio Grande do Sul, 1820-1821*, Brasília, Senado Federal, Conselho Editorial, 2002, respectivamente p. 347 e 431.

³⁶Joanne Rappaport, "Introduction: Interpreting the Past", In: _____, *The Politics of Memory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 21-22.

some Pueblos with fears that this contagious symptoms is more spread than what has been discovered.³⁷

The political empowerment obtained by the dominant codes of the colonial society was perceived by the Jesuits as something that turned the natives into “*ladinos*”, that is, people whose wit to understand the world was superior to the others. The ability to argue was evidence of such wittiness, and put some Jesuits in an uncomfortable position. Father Christobal Gomez, for instance, advised the Jesuits to live life in the reductions with a lot of “patience and charity”. Otherwise, they could be questioned by the natives. The latter, already *ladinos*, as mentioned by Gomez, argued that they could not be pressured to observe a conduct of respect for others if the priests did not follow it themselves.³⁸

*The reductions also maintained a considerable distance
between the rules in force and the social practices*

The *Ladinos* acquired a symbolic power that enabled them to face the Jesuits in moments of crisis, such as, during the attempts to establish the Treaty of Madrid.³⁹ In the *pueblo* of Yapeju, whose location was near several cities and favored the contact with the natives from the colonial society, they used the local legitimacy that could be opposed to the leadership of the Jesuits. According to father Bernardo Nusdorffer, *ladinos* intercepted the correspondence of the Jesuits searching for information and read the letters out loud for the other inhabitants of the missions. If we believe in the words of Nusdorffer, however, they did not read exactly what was written: they cleverly inserted whatever they thought necessary to convince the group of natives about certain subject. That is, they not only had the linguistic skills, but also the political “malice” to transform the prestige resulting from such skill into an instrument in the disputes with the Jesuits involving the application of the Treaty. According to the

³⁷Biblioteca Nacional de España. Cartas de los PP. Generales y Provinciales de la Compañía de Jesús a los misioneros jeuitas del Paraguay, Uruguay y Paraná [Manuscritos], s.XVIII. Localización: Mss/6976. Carta del Padre Provincial Diego Francisco Altamirano de 15 de noviembre de 1678, p. 99.

³⁸Biblioteca Nacional de España. Cartas de los PP. Generales y Provinciales de la Compañía de Jesús a los misioneros jeuitas del Paraguay, Uruguay y Paraná [Manuscritos], s.XVIII. Localización: Mss/6976. Carta para los PP Misioneros del Pa. Provl. Christobal Gomez en la Visita del año de 1673, p. 88.

³⁹The attempts to establish the Treaty of Madrid, especially conflicts involving the natives, have been object of a renewed interest for historiography. About the subject, see: Elisa Frühauf Garcia, *As diversas formas de ser índio: políticas indígenas e políticas indigenistas no extremo sul da América portuguesa*, Rio de Janeiro, Arquivo Nacional, 2009; Guillermo Wilde, *Religión y poder en las misiones de guaraníes*, Buenos Aires, SB, 2009; Lía Quarleri, *Rebelión y guerra en las fronteras del Plata: guaraníes, jesuitas e imperios coloniales*, Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2009.

Jesuit, the *ladinos* “found in them [the letters] what they did not say and put one thousand lies in their heads.”⁴⁰

Conclusions

From the aforementioned situations, it is possible to realize how the reality of the natives in the missions was not restricted to the relationships between the Indians and Jesuits: there were many other agents involved in that historical context. The interactions with the others were instruments that the natives used to build the significance of their status, which were sometimes closer and sometimes further from colonial legislation.

Being able to understand the world, they realized their position was subordinate: they worked hard, more than the others, earned little, could not enjoy their time with “freedom” and found difficulties in fulfilling their social, sexual and love desires. That is, these limitations imposed on them throughout their lives were attributed to their indigenous origin. More than discussing how much of this perception was a reflection of the current jurisdictional reality, it is important to mention how it can clarify the actions of the natives and the purposes that moved them. Were many of them unhappy with the community regime? Certainly, yes. Their wishes and goals, however, were connected to experiences and expectations that arose from their contact with the colonial society, and not only with the references about their collective past. The reproduction of this past did not necessarily correspond to the yearnings of all of the natives in the missions. After all, as pointed out by Marc Bloch, quoting a known Arab proverb, “men look more like their time than like their parents.”⁴¹

Therefore, the natives were not always defined by the wish to maintain their differences and their specific nature. It could be different: a definition based on the expectation of equality and freedom, based on their respective historical context, by crossing the paradigm of the Old Regime, and concrete situations. However, it is hard to confirm if the natives achieved what they were aiming for with their strategies. They were clearly skilled fighters in the dispute for material and symbolic benefits in the colonial society of *Río de la Plata*. As everybody else, however, they probably had successes and frustrations throughout the course of their lives.

⁴⁰Bernardo Nusdorffer, “Relacion de todo lo sucedido en estas Doctrinas en orden a las mudanzas de los 7 Pueblos del Uruguay desde S. Borja hasta S. Miguel inclusive, que por el tratado Real, y linea divisoria de los limites entre las dos Coronas, o se avian de entregar a los Portugueses, o se avian de mudar a otros parajes. Setembro de 1750 a fins de 1755,” In: Jaime Cortesão, *Do Tratado de Madri à conquista dos Sete Povos (1750-1802)*, Rio de Janeiro, Biblioteca Nacional, 1969, p. 252. For the analysis of the role of writing during the Guaranitic War, see: Eduardo Neumann, *Práticas letradas Guarani: produção e usos da escrita indígena (séculos XVII e XVIII)*, Tese de Doutorado em História, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2005.

⁴¹Marc Bloch, *Introducción a la historia*, México, D.F., Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000, p. 39.