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THE TERRITORIAL BOUNDARY established after the War of the Triple Alliance (1864–1870) entrenched a new regional reality ideologically marked by the presence of nation-states. The new national borders have since had a profound influence on the construction of historiographic perspectives on the region’s colonial past, often reproducing chronological, geographic, and social oversights that inhibit a fuller understanding of the complexity of this history. The Triple Frontier, as we conceive it today, is the outcome of a longue durée historical process that would have been difficult to foreshadow in the context of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In this chapter I reconstruct the colonial history of this region through the study of the social, economic, and political dynamics embedded in this territory through the Jesuit missions. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Jesuits established a presence on the southern frontier of the South American domains of Spain and Portugal. At the borders of the two empires, they erected a series of mission towns with the goal of converting local indigenous groups to Christianity. Also known as “reductions” (reducciones), the missions served to integrate the indigenous populations into a labor regime that would produce colonial tribute and help control the vast territory under dispute between the two European powers.¹ The Jesuit reductions sought to homogenize the indigenous population by imposing a uniform way of life based on urban colonial institutions and by standardizing a common language, Guarani. The

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² JESUIT MISSIONS AND THE GUARANI ETHNOGENESIS

Political Interactions, Indigenous Actors, and Regional Networks on the Southern Frontier of the Iberian Empires

GUILLERMO WILDE
demographic growth of the missions was remarkable, surpassing 100,000 people by the end of the seventeenth century. Moreover, the missions actively participated in the regional networks connecting the River Plate basin, Tucumán, and colonial Paraguay.

The missions were part of an extended network of Jesuit establishments that also contained schools and residences in cities. In regions such as Paraguay, it is possible to distinguish different types of connections in this network between (1) reductions in the same region or in remote regions, which ensured their mutual assistance; (2) reductions and cities, mainly through trade networks; (3) schools and residences in different cities (e.g., Buenos Aires, Cordoba, Asunción, Santiago de Chile); (4) both sides of the Atlantic through the circulation of special envoys to Madrid, Lisbon, and Rome. Missionaries circulated through different establishments to avoid occupying the same office or even staying in the same place for long periods. Periodically, selected priests were sent as procurators to the European courts in order to achieve the favor of monarchs, recruit new missionaries, and inform the general of the order on the needs of the Jesuit province.

In spite of this general picture, traditionally the missions have been considered as spaces isolated and disconnected from the rest of the region’s colonial circuits. Moreover, Indians were conceived as passive objects of colonial domination. With the emergence of a nationalist historiography in the nineteenth century, the history of the missions was fragmented along the national boundaries of present-day Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil. On top of that, church history generally emphasized the role of missionaries and ecclesial institutions in the evangelization process, leaving aside indigenous agency and perspectives. Recent studies have challenged these interpretations by emphasizing the regional integration and the role of indigenous groups both by showing how local populations were more than mere objects of economic and social oppression and also by countering idyllic visions of missions as utopias where unpolluted Christian ideals met indigenous traditions in a perfect symbiosis. To bring to the foreground the larger significance of the Jesuit missions, I will resituate them within the region’s wider dynamics. This approach focuses not only on the colonizing actions of the priests and the Spanish crown but more importantly, it explores how indigenous groups were active participants in these same processes.

For more than 150 years, the Jesuit missions contributed to the reconfiguration of the region’s political, economic, and social landscapes. The study of this
long-term process allows for the examination of two contradictory tendencies. The first is the creation of a new identity rooted in the organization of the mission towns, what I am calling an ethnogenesis. This identity was a result of the reconstitution of a territory fragmented by the effect of colonization. This singular new space was both shaped by the colonial Spanish institutions and urban nuclei put in place and the appropriation the indigenous population made of them. In contrast to the potentially homogenizing dynamic of the mission territory, a second trend was linked to a wider communal mobility. This latter aspect emerged from the diverse social composition of the indigenous populations and the ambiguity of ethnic frontiers in the region. These seemingly contradictory trends—a specific mission identity and a diverse regional one—reveal two complementary indigenous conceptions about the territoriality of the missions. On the one hand, they were established spaces of stable political institutions such as town councils and the church. On the other hand, they were also sites of fluid population networks that stretched far away from urban centers and brought indigenous groups into contact with a wide array of actors including defectors from the missions, Afro-descendent communities, and “heather” Indians. Occasionally, the missions also incorporated and absorbed these social linkages into their own internal dynamics.

Following the duality of this argument, this chapter is divided into two parts. The first reconstructs the ethnogenetic process of how the missions were formed in distinct historical stages. The second centers on the mechanisms through which the internal heterogeneity of the missions was produced, placing particular emphasis on the indigenous strategies of interactions with and representations of space and territoriality.

**THE HOMOGENIZATION OF MISSIONS AND ETHNOGENESIS**

The missions’ structure was based on the residential and linguistic segregation of an ensemble of indigenous populations from throughout the region. These different groups were relocated within the missions and administered with relative political and economic autonomy from the Spanish crown. A lack of historical documents from this period has meant that through the present day, very little is known about the broader sweep of this history. Yet the combination of what evidence is available allows for an understanding of the missions’ history as a
prolonged process of ethnogenesis: the confluence of demographic, political, legal, territorial, linguistic, and economic factors that contributed to the creation of new ethnic realities.\(^5\) The policy of reductions destructured indigenous society through the use of spatial circumscription to new territorial unities—the missions—and ethnic taxonomy. As such, this policy managed to create an idea of homogenous indigenous identity based on what was left of the indigenous groups’ diverse linguistic and cultural traits.\(^6\) Although there is little evidence to elucidate the exact details of these internal dynamics—and to cast light on the role of indigenous populations in these processes—it is clear that many groups did not survive the physical toll that pervaded the missions, and the subjected population suffered a continuous process of social, territorial, and ethnic reconstitution.

The missions represented a new stage in a process of territorial reorganization that had begun decades earlier with the establishment of institutions such as the encomienda, administrated by both encomenderos and Franciscan priests. When the Spaniards came into contact with indigenous groups at the start of the sixteenth century, they established a series of local and regional alliances that facilitated, among other aspects, the exchange and circulation of goods and indigenous women.\(^7\) Around 1530, Europeans—aided by the collaboration of certain local populations—explored new regions and soon founded towns and cities such as Asunción, Ciudad Real, Villa Rica, and Jerez de la Frontera. In the final decades of the sixteenth century, two European religious orders, the Franciscans and the Jesuits, established a definitive presence in what was then Paraguay and helped create the first *pueblos de indios* (villages of Indians). On the one hand, the villages created by the Franciscan order were deeply integrated into the wider and older network of encomiendas in Paraguay. The *pueblos* founded by the Jesuits, on the other hand, gradually established their own system, which extracted indigenous labor and paid direct tributes to the Spanish crown, preventing the intervention of the encomenderos.\(^8\) This helped the Jesuit reductions to gain a heightened level of political autonomy and economic self-sufficiency.

The Jesuits explored a vast tract of land between the regions of Guairá, Itatín, Paraná, and Tapé, where more than seventy *reducción* villages were established. Some became long-term settlements, while others had fleeting existences (fig. 1.1). Effectively, the majority of the missions founded by the Jesuits in the first half of the seventeenth century were destroyed by *bandeirantes*, bands of slavers from São Paulo who captured indigenous people to perform forced labor...
on the Brazilian coast. Other determining factors of these early demographic changes were waves of epidemics brought by European colonizers and also the invasion of hostile indigenous groups broadly referred to as “heathens” (infeles) at the time. Beginning in the 1630s, the Jesuits transferred most of the reduced indigenous population from the Guairá, Itatín, Acaray-Iguazú, and Tapé regions away from the bandeirantes, to southern areas around the Paraná and Uruguay Rivers. These migrations disrupted regional populations and forced them to reconstruct themselves in new regions. This pattern of population and territorial shifts meant that by the end of the seventeenth century, the majority of mission populations came from distant regions, about four hundred kilometers away from the new location (fig. 2.1).9

The incorporated populations were assimilated into mission life under the same economic, political, and linguistic standard marking the start of a process of “mission ethnogenesis” and profound territorial reconfiguration.10 This was the result of bringing together dispersed populations who, having accepted a Christian life, now lived in villages with a defined urban structure, spoke a common language—the Guarani of the missions—and followed a uniform religious schedule.11 Although contemporary letters and Jesuit chronicles describe a diversity of indigenous groups who spoke a wide range of languages, the process of reducción tended to impose a cultural and linguistic homogenization.12 In the eighteenth century, and after several rehearsals, the urban structure of mission towns was settled permanently. It was constituted by a central plaza surrounded by lines of houses of the same size. On one of the sides of the plaza was located the church, the cemetery, the college, and the artisans’ workshops.

Many of the classic ethnohistories of the Guarani focus on the existence of extensive indigenous sociopolitical structures represented by big regional leaders at the time of contact with Spaniards.13 Yet the evidence indicates that the influence of indigenous leaders did not extend beyond the territorial limits of the local group; the dimensions of large houses, or malocas, were occasionally mistaken to be entire villages or small towns. The Jesuit Van Suerck noted that “in every house there is a chief, what the Spanish call ‘caciques’ and the Indians call ‘the big one.’ Aside from his name, in him there is no grandness whatsoever, as his authority over his subjects is almost nonexistent.” According to Van Suerck, between one hundred and two hundred Indians lived in the houses, not counting women and children. He also observed that most women tended to marry men of the same indigenous groups. The references made by Van Suerck to the local group were very imprecise. He appears to only allude to the domain
FIGURE 2.1 Settlements along the Uruguay and Paraná Rivers in the eighteenth century. Map by Frederico Freitas.
of the houses (or habitation structures) that “are separated between them by a space of one league and sometimes by one or many days journey.” Among the Jesuits’ main tasks was to minimize the distances between families and eliminate the isolation of houses in order to cluster together the largest number of Indians in one site. The initial phase of indigenous demographic fragmentation occurred when the chiefs of families or of teyj were incorporated into the mission reductions. Family leaders were then rebranded as “caciques,” and the members of their specific chiefdom (cacicazgo) were also conferred with the title of mboya, a term that alluded to the members of the cacicazgo subordinated to the cacique. While prehispanic families could include more than two hundred people, the cacicazgos incorporated to the missions rarely surpassed one hundred members, an indication that the missions’ social organization radically fragmented the prehispanic units.

All of the indigenous population living in the missions was distributed into cacicazgos of different sizes. The cacicazgo was the basic social, political, and economic unit of organization and the basis for the organization of missions’ territoriality. Caciques determined the urban structure of the Jesuit villages and the surrounding comarca. The Jesuit Anton Sepp wrote in the early eighteenth century that during harvest season it was the caciques who received donkeys and bulls to assign them to specific “vassals” for the necessary work. Decades later, a colonial official explained how the lands were distributed. He observed that “the Indians themselves have no land as property.” Rather, it was “each cacicazgo” that had discretion over the lands surrounding the villages where the cacique and the other chiefdom members had their crop fields. According to the same source, at least as early as the eighteenth century all cacicazgos contained “barns or lines of houses of equal size and proportion, with tiled roofs and alleys on all sides for the transit of people.” The rows of houses corresponded to the number of mboyas belonging to each cacicazgo.

Occasionally, the cacicazgos were fragmented for a variety of reasons that included death in the family, adoption, banishment, evasion, marriage, and migration, among other factors. A Jesuit named Escandón referred, for example, to the indigenous traditions of marriage, childcare, and breastfeeding that determined the residential distribution between different families and even across different villages. The 1750s Guarani War, triggered by the Treaty of Madrid, was especially devastating for the Guarani population, disrupting the system of cacicazgos. A high number of indigenous soldiers lost their lives, and the war led to the relocation of the local population to other villages, which lasted at least
until the suppression of the treaty in 1761. In spite of these traumatic events, the
system of cacicazgos continued to be an important element in the organization of
the region’s territoriality after the Jesuits’ expulsion. The persistence of cacicazgos
over time was ensured through the establishment of mechanisms for succession
that were often a source of conflict between the Indians. While the Jesuits
established a scheme of succession based on blood and primogeniture, a section
of the indigenous population tried to manipulate the decision on the succession
in favor of existing political networks or interests for social promotion.20

Beyond these internal disputes it is clear that the caciques collaborated with
the missionaries in the missions’ government. The caciques were incorporated
into local councils (cabildos), militias, and church posts. The imposition of a
new bureaucratic administration also resulted in the incorporation of new tech-
nologies. Writing was one of them. A large number of manuscripts have been
discovered that indicate that the skill of writing was important in the missions’
daily life and that its practice was widespread among the members of the indig-
igenous elite. Writing was an unknown technology for the Indians inhabiting the
area before European invasion. But the Indians appropriated it after just a few
decades. Some members of the indigenous elite, such as the secretaries of the
council, musicians, and fellows of the brotherhoods (cofradías), were known for
their writing abilities. Indians not only produced bureaucratic texts but also doc-
trinal and theological ones, some of which were published using the missions’
printing press.21 Two remarkable examples are the books Sermones y ejemplos
and Explicación del catecismo, written by cacique and musician Nicolas Yapu-
guay. The Indians also produced historical documents such as diaries of military
campaigns. Writing was for them not only a tool of communication but also a
source of social and political prestige, especially during times of political crisis.22

Despite a series of vicissitudes—including invasions, desertions, pillage, dis-
ease, and forced relocation—by the dawn of the eighteenth century the missions
had managed to implement a relatively autonomous and uniform economic and
political system. Stability translated into a rapid demographic growth. Toward
the end of the seventeenth century, the missions already harbored more than
50 percent of the population of the River Plate basin, counting some 67,000
inhabitants distributed among twenty-two towns. By the 1730s, that number
nearly doubled to 140,000 people living in thirty towns.23

The first stage in establishing a mission consisted of removing Indians from
their forest villages—preferably by means of persuasion—to resettle them in
new locations where they would be instructed in Christian doctrine, organized
according to an urban layout and logic of economic production, and taxed for tribute to the Spanish crown. In the often violent colonial context of the era, this radical change to the indigenous way of life sometimes offered a sense of protection if not actual survival for communities that were otherwise threatened by institutions such as the encomienda and the regional slave trade. Yet living in a mission did not always guarantee safety. Almost immediately after the first of the missions was founded in Guairá in 1610, they experienced a wave of attacks from bandeirantes that lasted over three decades. The missions in Itatín were ransacked in 1632, while the reductions of Uruguay and Tapé were invaded numerous times between 1636 and 1641. Some of the missions’ original inhabitants died in these attacks, and others were relocated to areas that were less exposed to outside dangers. Although these assaults continued through the end of the seventeenth century, they largely subsided after 1641 when recently formed armed Guarani militias defeated the Luso-Brazilian slavers in the famous battle of Mbororé.

Between the 1640s and the 1690s, the territory of the missions was contained to the most part to the area of modern-day Argentine Mesopotamia, which comprises the present-day Argentine provinces of Misiones, Entre Ríos, and Corrientes. During this time, indigenous groups fleeing the invaded regions of the Paraná and Uruguay Rivers comprised most of the population of the missions. These migrations toward Jesuit reductions were led by caciques who often were able to absorb multiple communities en route to the missions. Historical documents inform us about the approximate size of indigenous migratory groups. In the village of Itapúa, the governor Lariz wrote that a cacique named Anton Tacaro appeared with ninety Indians who had left the Tape region after a bandeirante attack. Of the original forty Jesuit villages, only twenty-two—of which sixteen were relocated from the zones of Iguazú, Guairá, Itatín, and Uruguay—remained toward the end of the seventeenth century. The majority of the reduction Indians had been relocated to their respective missions, and very few lived in their region of origin. Of the twenty missions in the zones of the Paraná and Uruguay Rivers, for example, only six contained indigenous groups from the immediate surrounding area. The constant migrations of indigenous communities meant that even if most of the missions clustered in close proximity, their inhabitants hailed from regions across and beyond the area we recognize today as the Triple Frontier. Moreover, many of the reductions were themselves mobile because the threat of outside attack led to the relocation of entire mission communities. This was due in part to the invasions by bandeirantes and “hostile” Indians and also to disease outbreaks. Over the
course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, illnesses such as smallpox, tertian fever, and measles reduced the region’s indigenous population by as much as 50 percent. The Jesuits often relocated missions to new sites chosen for their sanitary qualities to accommodate increasingly larger reduction populations or for better access to water and other natural resources.28

Between approximately 1690 and 1730, the missions and their dwellers began to expand toward the eastern shores of the Uruguay River, where seven new mission towns were established. The Jesuits transferred many indigenous inhabitants from other reductions to these new locations. Due in large measure to the introduction of cattle ranching on the new settlements, this became one of the most prosperous periods for the Jesuit missions, both in terms of productive output and population size, which passed the mark of 140,000 people.

The final phase of the missions, however, was marked by a profound demographic crisis, with a drop in indigenous population of nearly a half by the 1740s. There were many reasons for this decline. Among the most important was the series of epidemics that ravaged numerous villages; evidence suggests that 18,733 Guarani mission inhabitants died of measles in 1733 alone, and another thirty thousand perished of smallpox between 1738 and 1739.29 Another factor in the demographic shift was the role of Guarani militias in helping put down regional uprisings, such as the prolonged “revolt of the comuneros” in the city of Asunción or the capture of the Portuguese river port of Colônia do Sacramento. Scholars calculate that nearly twelve thousand Guarani militiamen collaborated with the military expeditions formed against the comunero revolt in 1724 and again in 1733–1735, which is to say that more than a third of the active male indigenous population was deployed away from their home regions to fight in faraway conflicts.30

A series of letters from Jesuit chroniclers written in this period indicate that between the final decades of the seventeenth century and the middle of the eighteenth century, the colonial governorships of Buenos Aires and Asunción employed Guarani militias on seventy occasions, conscripting around forty thousand men. Many of the indigenous soldiers were used to defend the Spanish cities and their surrounding agricultural lands against attacks from both the Guaycuru Indians and Portuguese colonial troops. The Guarani militias also helped construct and repair buildings and churches and aided in escorting the colonial governor, the delivery of cattle and provisions, and the manning of lookout posts.31

After the crisis of the 1730s, the Guarani population began to recover, although the territorial reach of the missions never expanded much farther. Two decades later, however, the reductions along the eastern shores of the Uruguay
River suffered from a violent conflict that came to be known as the “Guarani War,” in which seven eastern villages confronted a mixed Portuguese and Spanish colonial army. The Treaty of 1750 had stipulated that Portugal cede to Spain the port of Colônia do Sacramento in the Río de la Plata in exchange for a portion of the territory of the Jesuit Province in Paraguay. Seven indigenous villages refused to follow colonial Spain’s relocation order and staged an armed resistance from 1754 to 1756. The conflict between the Guarani militias and the combined armies of both the Spanish and Portuguese crowns resulted in the death of over fifteen hundred Indians. The defeat of the indigenous uprising was followed by a forced resettlement in 1757 of the seven villages onto twenty-one different locations on the opposite side of the Uruguay River.32

In 1761 the previous treaty between Spain and Portugal was annulled, and the indigenous population was allowed to return to their original lands. But by that time, many Indians had opted to continue migrating even farther. A fair number of the Indians eventually settled in the aldeias of the Portuguese-controlled area of current-day Rio Grande do Sul. The aldeias were mission-styled towns directly controlled by the Portuguese crown. One of these indigenous towns, Aldeia dos Anjos (“the village of angels”) was established in 1762 in an area close to present-day Porto Alegre with thirty-five hundred inhabitants who had previously lived in the Jesuit missions some four hundred kilometers west. The violent conflicts and inter-Iberian tensions also facilitated migration away from the reductions and toward the disputed Banda Oriental—future Uruguay. Far from the influence of colonial powers, independent indigenous communities could be formed more easily, as exemplified by the foundation of the Las Viboras settlement in 1758.33

In the aftermath of the Jesuits’ expulsion (1768), other religious orders (Franciscans, Mercedarians, and Dominicans) were sent to the Guarani communities in order to safeguard the spiritual well-being of the Indians without interfering in the economy of local towns—the latter task having been designated as the purview of newly designated Spanish colonial administrators. Although the social and political organization of the missions persisted with few alterations, the post-Jesuit period witnessed a rapid economic collapse. This, in turn, caused new demographic crises and the gradual assimilation of the reduction Indians into the surrounding rural populations.34 The reshuffling of local hierarchies resulted in immediate conflicts as the relatively stable economic order of the Jesuit era quickly disappeared. The deteriorating economic climate pushed a large portion of the Guarani away from the missions in search of employment,
both into the surrounding countryside and in towns and cities much farther away. Health epidemics also continued to ravage local communities even after the expulsion of the Jesuits, adding to the accelerated disbursement and disintegration of the mission populations throughout the region.

**HETEROGENEITY AND MOBILITY**

The missions were conceived of as spaces to bring together groups of divergent geographic, cultural, and linguistic origins. Although this goal was intended to foster a long-term sense of communal stability, it often produced the opposite effect as the deeply rooted differences ultimately helped fracture the mission experiment. The sought-after homogenization proved to be an illusion as many groups clung to their own forms of autonomous organization and identity and refused to conform to the reduction structure.

Even the groups that did accept cohabitation in the missions were resistant to integration with other indigenous communities, as they tended to coalesce in their own “neighborhoods,” which granted them a degree of independence. These neighborhoods had a hierarchy system derived from the cacicazgos present in them. Importance, for example, derived from spatial proximity to the main plaza. Such a hierarchy also manifested in the order the cacicazgos appeared in the periodical census of the villages. More research needs to be done to determine the exact logic underlying the division of chiefdoms, districts, and neighborhoods within a given mission village. This will allow future scholars to better understand the internal structures of missions while also retracing the migration patterns that led specific communities to settle on particular reductions.

Heterogeneity in the missions partially resulted from the incorporation of indigenous populations that had not accepted Christianity, which were called “heathen” (infieles) in the documents. These groups were brought into the mission fold both by peaceful and coerced methods. In both cases, it was often the mission Indians who did the actual work of bringing in the heathens, either through persuasion or physical violence. One example comes from the Jesuit village of Yapeyú in the meridional zone, where the mission Indians were tasked with incorporating the “heathen” Charrúa and Minuanes communities. The latter group was a problem because of its habit of raiding the reduction to steal cattle. Other cases, such as the village of Jesús in the northern reaches
of the Triple Frontier, indicate that the missions also attempted to integrate entire preexisting chiefdoms. Jesuit accounts frequently describe expeditions formed by indigenous members of Christian fraternities (congregaciones) to heathen country to convince infidels to accept Christianity. Sometimes they brought those Indians by force to the missions to learn the basics of civil life and devotion.

Despite the Jesuits’ attempts to implement and maintain a sense of homogenized order, the indigenous groups were largely able to maintain their own forms of internal ethnic and political diversity over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This was especially evident in the persistence of linguistic variation within the missions in spite of the attempts to establish the use of a universal Guarani language. At a general level, the missions imposed the main aspects of colonial urbanization through the creation of municipalities and church institutions. In turn, they were appropriated by Indians who, at a local level, kept a certain degree of heterogeneity and autonomy associated with the organization of basic social units such as cacicazgos and nuclear families.

The primary difficulty in overseeing the missions was the need to regulate and control these forms of ethnic and social diversity. Failing to do so could lead to conflicts within the reductions and hinder the possibility of creating new kinship networks. As one Jesuit letter observes,

They make frequent excursions from these same villages to the surrounding infidels, such as the Guañanas that live north along the Paraná River; and those in the fields near the Uruguay River of the Guenao nation; and those who live among the forests even farther north of the village of Jesús of the Gualchaqui nation; and those who live in the forests between the Paraguay and Paraná Rivers of the Tobatí nation, to where, for reasons given by my superiors in the month of October last year, I dispatched two of my subjects, even though the recently converted inhabitants near the Paraná and Uruguay are not that great, so that they can form a new village, the numbers of those who receive Christ our Father do not cease to grow almost every year, especially in the Gualchaqui and Guañana nations. . . . I myself brought to the village of Jesús eighteen people and six more from the upper Paraná; years later, they have brought others from the same location; many more have been added to the body of the Guañana nation, and there has not been a lack of the Guenoas, who have joined with those of San Francisco de Borja, Concepción, San Xavier, and San Nicolás; of the Charrúas and also the Guenoas with the Yapeyú.
The above quote is proof of the ethnic heterogeneity that lay at the core of mission territoriality, the result of the continuous interactions that mission Indians maintained with the dwellers of the surroundings and the occasional incorporation of nonconverted Indians (infieles) to the missions. These relations penetrated the internal and external realities of the missions, spaces that the Jesuits were incapable of entirely regulating. Documents from the end of the eighteenth century make frequent reference to these connections. For example, in September of 1770 a group of “heathen” Cainguá Indians “from the jungle” arrived in the estancia of San Javier near the Jesuit mission of Jesús guided by a cacique named Guirabo. They brought a bow and six arrows as a gift for the Indian taking care of the estancia, who immediately repaid the honor with an iron ax. The Indians came from an area known as Biraitagua and were known for their clandestine incursions into the yerba mate fields in the region. On this occasion, it appears that they wanted to gain information about the nearby Jesús mission and to find out whether it had axes, machetes, fabric, and other items that they needed. The caretaker informed the Cainguá that they could find all they required in the Jesús mission provided that they voluntarily went to live with the Jesuits and their families. Before leaving—claiming that they had to return to take care of their crop fields at home—the Cainguá lamented that the mission was too far away and that they had relatives living there that they would have liked to see. They then told the Indian caretaker that the woods harbored more Indians than in the entire Province of Paraná and that they would soon return with their wives and children. They also promised that upon their return they would bring a “little Guayaqui Indian” as a present chosen from among those that they had captured “as slaves.”

We do not know exactly how the above saga concluded, but the story is revealing nonetheless of how indigenous groups at the time could see the missions as a space of potential personal gain. The inverse situation also occurred, with mission Indians obtaining distinct and complementary advantages beyond the walls of the reductions by interacting with surrounding “heathens.” What we do know is that many Indians remained outside of the Jesuit missions for extended periods of time working on agricultural fields or yerba mate gathering. These forays allowed mission Indians to gain intimate knowledge of the vast areas surrounding the missions—the rainforest, the countryside, the commercial routes, the flows of water, and all manner of geographic markers. Mission Indians also managed to establish relationships with a wide array of indigenous and nonindigenous actors throughout the region.
One of the central places for interaction was the estancias, grazing fields, and other types of cattle-ranching establishments under the control and supervision of certain missions. Indians used to spend long periods of time there, which allowed them to develop a relatively autonomous social life. These establishments covered the basic economic needs of workers and their families, and in many cases they also had chapels for liturgical activity. These spaces allowed maintenance of the basic aspects of daily life in a mission at the same time that they provided for a more fluid contact with the nonindigenous population and access to information on the general situation in the region.

The missions experienced occasional disputes over control of territory and resources, requiring the update of agreements and the organization of expeditions. However, these initiatives were not enough to prevent a prolonged state of litigation between missions for territorial control. Each mission claimed its territorial autonomy. The disputes initiated during the Jesuit period continued after their expulsion. In 1769 Yapeyú confronted La Cruz for control of a “mountain.” Shortly after, new disputes emerged between San Nicolas and San Jose and Trinidad and Jesús. Later, the Jesuit Segismundo Asperger denounced the Indians of mission San Borja for trying to expand their land and livestock at the expense of the San Nicolas mission. As a post-Jesuit official notices, disputes derived from the ambiguous way boundaries were set. He wrote that the lands were not distributed among individuals. The owner was the mission. Some villages had received titles from judges, others from governors, but some had no actual deed. The mission town of Yapeyú, for example, claimed a huge territory over the Uruguay River but had no title confirming its possessions. Yapeyú’s territorial claims were based solely on a map from an inventory for the Jesuit Jaime Mascaro produced at the time of the expulsion. In fact, the Jesuits had been mediators in the conflicts between mission towns over the control of lands. They defended the rights of the missions they represented and were particularly interested in recording, with the assistance of the Indians, all the information about the land use and communication between relevant locations.

The confection of maps—a skill that, like writing, was taught by Jesuit priests—served as an important tool for indigenous leaders still living in missions to articulate and make demands regarding their territorial rights. Indigenous maps are an especially illuminating resource because they allow us to visualize Native representations of territory. These documents show in great detail the characteristics of the wide spaces of indigenous mobility, depicting roads, rivers, water sources, chapels, and a variety of sites that were fundamental to indigenous life in the countryside. It is interesting to note that these maps did

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not necessarily constitute accurate visual representations in terms of geography and topography. Instead, they depicted a sense of territorial dimensions based on the practical nature of the landscapes, showing only the features related to their everyday life, such as communication and commercial routes (both rivers and on land) and the networks between villages. As such, these maps demonstrate a conception of space in which there is no clear differentiation between the internal and external dimensions of the missions. Rather than functioning as a distinct and autonomous area, missions belonged to a larger web in which the urban nuclei of Jesuit reductions was just one small part of an entire constellation of sites that held social, economic, and symbolic meanings for the region's indigenous populations. These maps not only exhibited mission Indians’ knowledge of space but also provided clues about the traditional uses and circuits associated with that knowledge.

After the Jesuits expulsion, both writing and cartography persisted among Indians as autonomous practices that allowed for communicating directly with the colonial administration. Indigenous leaders were aware of changes in the government and used their skills and technical knowledge to redefine positions of power in the new map of relations. By accurately recording events and registering spatial marks, indigenous leaders contributed to the forging of community identity, the construction of power, and the consolidation of social memory.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have described the formation of the Jesuit missions in Paraguay as a two-stage process. First, indigenous populations were fragmented and forced to relocate to the reductions. This initial step then opened the path for a territorial and social restructuring based on a new model of village life that was imposed on mission Indians. Compared with the social organization of other indigenous communities in the same region (such as those controlled by the encomenderos and the Franciscan priests), the core difference was the relative political and economic autonomy enabled by life in the missions. At various moments, the formation of a mission-based identity resulted from the exception of the encomienda system, residential segregation, a degree of economic self-sufficiency, self-rule, and the intensity of religious life and customs. This did not, however, imply the creation of an isolated, homogenous, and fixed territorial and conceptual space. Quite the opposite, in fact, since the missions were defined by a dynamic sense of heterogeneity throughout their entire existence. Above all,
this ethnic, social, and geographic complexity was nourished in the interactions that the missions’ indigenous populations maintained with the surrounding comarca. This continued to be the dynamic even after the Jesuits’ expulsion.

NOTES


comparison between the Franciscan and the Jesuit systems, see Juan Carlos Gar-

9. Ernesto Maeder, “La población de las misiones de Guaraníes (1641–1682): Reu-


11. The first systematic attempts of reduction took place in Peru under Viceroy Fran-
cisco de Toledo, specially sent by the king to reorganize the South American ter-
ritory. Toledo created many reductions, entrusting the supervision of some of them to the Jesuits. Among these was the well-known José de Acosta, author of the mission manual *Procuranda Indorum Salute* and *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*. Toledo previously had the collaboration of Juan de Matienzo, judge of the Audiencia of Charcas, in the definition of the population and urban parameters of the reductions. These included the selection of proper places, the intervention of indigenous leaders, and the use of land for public use. On the evolution of colonial urbanism, see Ramón Gutiérrez, *Arquitectura y urbanismo en Iberoamérica* (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1983). On the policy of reducciones, see Jeremy Ravi Mumford, “Vertical Empire: The General Resettlement of Indians in the Colonial Andes” (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Akira Saito and Claudia Rosas Lauro, eds., *Reducciones: La concentración forzada de las poblaciones indígenas en el Virreinato del Perú* (Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2017).


15. According to late accounts, such as that of Jesuit Escandón, the cacicazgos generally had between twenty and thirty caciques. Escandón writes, “Estos con todos los de su parcialidad tienen alrededor del pueblo sus tierras determinadas en qué sembrar, más o menos, según son mayores o menores las parcialidades o cacicazgos, y dentro de aquel término cada cual tiene su pedazo o pedazos de terreno, en que sembrar su maíz, sus batatas, mandiocas, legumbres etc. de suerte que, no por falta de tierra, dejará de sembrar lo que quisiere, sin tener que ir a buscar terreno a la jurisdicción o como jurisdicción de otra parcialidad. Estas tierras de labor, como todas las demás de la jurisdicción de cada pueblo son todas del común del mismo pueblo, y ningún particular tiene más que el usufructo de ellas, y así no se las venden unos a otros.
Y lo mismo sucede con las casas en que viven en el pueblo, en el cual también hay su género de división de cacicazgos, y en una o dos calles de él vive un cacique con los de su parcialidad; y en otra u otras calles vive otro con los de la suya: pero todas estas casas las hace, y si es menester las compone y reedifica si se arruinan, el común del pueblo.” Guillermo Furlong, *Juan Escandón y su carta a Burriel (1760)* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Theoria, 1965), 108.


18. Ibid., 162.


22. On indigenous writing, see the pioneer book by Eduardo Neumann, *Letra de indio: cultura escrita, comunicación e memória indígena nas reduções do Paraguai* (São Bernardo do Campo: Nhanduti, 2015). Most of the known indigenous manuscripts were produced in the eighteenth century, but accounts indicate that writing practices were introduced in a very early phase in the missions, probably in the first half of the seventeenth century.


25. The figures about the Indians captured by the *bandeirantes* are not clear. They oscillate between 30,000 and 190,000 people according to different authors. On this, the classical studies by Hemming are not sufficiently updated. John Hemming, *Red


27. Of the ten reductions of the Paraná River region, only three had a population native to the area—San Ignacio Guazú, Encarnación de Itapúa, and Corpus Christi. The population of the other seven came from the Guairá, Ijuí, and Tapé, regions that had been constantly attacked by bandeirantes. Of the ten reductions of the Uruguay River area, only three harbored local Indian groups—Concepción, Yapeyú, and San Francisco Javier. The other seven reductions had population not only from Ijuí and Tapé but also from Iguazú and Ibicuy. See Maeder, “La población.”

28. Epidemics ravaged the missions constantly. Even though not all of them had the same effect, the incidence of this factor in the missionary demography is striking throughout the history of Jesuit presence. Specialized bibliography registers the following years of epidemics: 1613, 1614–1615, 1617, 1618–1620, 1627–1629, 1628–1632, 1634–1638, 1640, 1661, 1667, 1695, 1700, 1718, 1733–1734, 1735–1736, 1738–1740, 1749, and 1764–1765. See reference in note 13.


32. For demographic information about this relocalization see Maeder and Bolsi, “La población.”

33. Wilde, Religión y poder.


37. Jesuit Muriel writes, “todos los años por lo regular salen los neophitos á misión, una vez solos, otra vez acompañados de algún missionero.” Guillermo Furlong,


41. “Carta de Juan de la Granja y Alvarez a Francisco Bruno de Zavala. Reducción de Jesús, 14 de septiembre de 1770,” Sala IX.18.5.1, Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires, Argentina.


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