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Articles

Commercial policies in frontier reductions: Models, reappropriations and disputes (Río de la Plata, 18th century)

Políticas mercantiles en espacios reduccionales fronterizos: Modelos, reapropiaciones y disputas (Río de la Plata, siglo XVIII)

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is an analysis of the commercial policy implemented by the colonial bureaucracy on the Guarani Reductions, also the adaptations, responses and conflicts this process originated. The historical sources are analyzed from an anthropological perspective. First, the colonial commercial policies applied on the Guarani missions are put in context. Second, the controversies within the colonial administration are interpreted. Finally, indications of indigenous participation in this trade is described. The bias found in the official documents is a limitation of this study. Its value, however, lies in an analysis which brings together regulations, conflicts and indigenous agency. It is concluded that the political mediation designed to hinder the missionary population's free access to the new commercial system had the opposite effect.

Keywords: Bourbon bureaucracy, commercial practices, Guarani Missions, Río de la Plata frontiers.

Resumen

El objetivo del artículo es analizar el modelo mercantil de intervención borbónica en las reducciones guaraníes atendiendo a las adaptaciones, respuestas y conflictos derivados. La metodología utilizada es el análisis de fuentes históricas desde una perspectiva antropológica. En primer lugar, se esclarecieron las directrices borbónicas del libre comercio en las misiones guaraníes. En segundo lugar, se plasmaron las controversias existentes entre las autoridades coloniales. Por último, se dieron indicios de la participación indígena en dicho comercio. Las limitaciones estuvieron dadas por el sesgo de las propias

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fuentes oficiales. El valor del estudio reside en la realización de un análisis articulado a partir de las normativas, los conflictos y la agencia indígena. Se llegó a la conclusión de que la intermediación política configurada para obstruir el libre acceso de la población misionera al nuevo sistema mercantil generó un proceso contrario. Asimismo, que este proceso se dio dentro de un poder colonial fragmentado.

Palabras clave: burocracia borbónica, prácticas mercantiles, reducciones guaraníes, fronteras de Río de la Plata.

Introduction

In 1788, the intendant governor of Buenos Aires, Francisco de Paula Sanz, asked departmental Hispanic authorities in the Guaraní missions under his jurisdiction to inform him of the profits or losses of commercial operations in those towns. One of the issues that concerned him was the coming and going of merchants from neighboring districts without any apparent controls; they brought beverages and sold communal products at low prices, purchasing other goods privately without any consideration for necessity or convenience. The responses to his request expressed a range of opinions and positions. Many testified to the competing interests of Hispanic authorities and the Guaraní of the missions. They also demonstrated the labyrinthine paths the commercial operations had followed in the reductions after the expulsion of the Jesuits. In this regard, open trade had generated a set of unintended consequences that were intensified by the existence of an unprepared administrative bureaucracy interested in obtaining additional benefits.

A general view of the problem brings to mind the implicit contradictions associated with the utopia of the market, with issues that were particular to the era. Written ordinances introduced, regulated and oversaw the commercial practices of the missions.[1] They had been conceived by Governor Francisco de Bucarelli, who had been in charge of the expulsion of the Jesuits, with the objective of regulating, among other things, the new political economy of the Guaraní.[2] With certain differences, the subsequent regulations and directives reproduced the links between commerce, progress, happiness and equality contained in the category of "enlightened commerce." Despite early warnings that the mission economy had drastically deteriorated, none of

[1] The Jesuits had structured the economy of the missions based on certain patterns of Guaraní organization. Once the towns of the reductions were founded, the Ignatians organized a system of family and communal production. The first consisted of the cultivation of subsistence products on parcels of land obtained by families based on their membership in a parcel or chiefdom. The second was based on production on commonly held lands, with the objective of obtaining goods to be stored, exchanged with other reductions and traded regionally. The commercialization process was centralized in the hands of the Jesuits. Profits from the sale of products such as yerba mate served to cover taxes paid to the Crown; support the priests; pay the salaries of the members of the indigenous town council; purchase goods and tools not produced internally; and fund the construction, investment and maintenance of buildings, workshops and various facilities, among other things.

[2] At that time, the Guaraní reductions comprised a complex of thirty towns located on what are now the borders of Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. Around the date of the expulsion, they were populated by 90 000 people in a zone that was historically disputed with the Portuguese in Brazil, located on roads and waterways connected to the principal ports and markets of the Río de la Plata region.

those involved in regulating, intervening in or consulting on the issue objected to the buying and selling of mission products, in large part because they were involved.

In this article, we propose to analyze the ideological foundations of the Bourbon model of intervention in mission commerce, demonstrating both the different concepts at play and the conflicts of interest among various bureaucratic and colonial authorities. The intention is to highlight, in particular, the controversy generated by the free circulation of Spanish merchants within the missions and also to discuss contested perspectives regarding the participation of the Guaraní population in the buying and selling of reduction goods. In this regard, we start from the hypothesis that political and administrative mediation based on the supposed indigenous inability to trade actually generated the opposite effect: the Guaraní population participated in the market through unregulated trade in livestock and the acquisition of goods that were hidden from administrators. Allusions to these practices, although indirect, were rampant in officials' arguments about control of mission resources.[3]

Disputes over the destiny of the resources of indigenous communities are part of the larger problematic colonial history of the Americas. In this sense, much research has examined the effects of mercantile colonialism in Latin America, focusing on various situations with regard to regional economies, fiscal pressures, labor demands, *cacique* structures and communal strategies. Various studies have also explored indigenous participation in mercantile circuits in crucial viceregal zones and marginal jurisdictions as well as in urban and rural spaces and frontiers of colonization.[4] In particular, by increasing control over local commercial networks and seeking greater tax revenues, Bourbon reforms encouraged communal economies. For its part, Río de la Plata, given the border situation with Portuguese colonies, experienced the combined effects of both Bourbon and Pombaline reforms in the context of renewed competition for control of markets, indigenous labor, resources, waterways and productive spaces.

The Bourbon reform project, in its multiple strands, was applied to the Guaraní missions after the expulsion of the Jesuits, with particular contradictions. The installation of a Spanish administration, the openness of the missions to different commercial interests, and the arrival of new residents unleashed a profound deterioration of the reduction complex. Specialized historiography has delved extensively into the negative impacts of this process on the towns, including population loss, mortality and flight, the deterioration of relationships of ethnic authority and administrative misappropriation, among other issues (Maeder, 1992; Poetniz & Poetniz, 1998).[5] This happened in the context of growing external

[3] Consideration of indigenous participation is based on the official documentation, enriched by non-linear research perspectives such as that expressed through Walter Benjamin's (1982) notion to brush history against the grain.

[4] Worth mentioning is the compilation by Jorge Silva Riquer and Antonio Escobar Ohmstede (2000), the publication coordinated by Silvia Palomeque and Fernando Jumar (2007) and the dossier compiled by Sara Ortelli (2011). In particular, it is interesting to note those studies that demonstrate economic exchanges within illegal or informal circuits as part of the mercantile realm, as well as the configuration of "border markets" based on them (Cavieres, 2011).

[5] In a recent work, Julia Sarreal (2014) presented a proposal different from that traditionally adopted by historiography, highlighting that, in a context of crisis, the preferences and adaptations of the Guaraní played an important role by assuming modalities of access to resources of a more individual nature. This, in turn, was related to resistance to the coercive system of communal production; this resistance was expressed in escapes and complaints about the abuses of the Spanish administrators and Guaraní *corregidores*.

demand for leather, which led to the exploitation of mission cattle.[6] It was also in the context of the occupation of the land surrounding the missions, especially farms in the ranching towns, and the desire for Guaraní resources by individuals and public officials (Caletti, 2015).

Based on the analysis of the positions of local and viceregal officials overseeing mission commerce and based in Buenos Aires, we seek to account for ideological controversies and competition for pueblo resources among different colonial authorities. This will begin with a description of the model of economic intervention expressed in the ordinances of Governor Francisco de Bucarelli, followed by an investigation into the reappropriations carried out by Spanish officials and the mission population amid conflicts for the benefits of commercialization. It is important, as well, to consider the indirect references to indigenous participation found in the gaps in the documents.[7] Indigenous agency was part of the argument made by colonial authorities regarding profits or losses due to the presence of merchants in the towns, and it was also referred to when condemning individual trade or sales of goods without the intervention of Bourbon bureaucracy.

The Legal Framework and Economic Model

After the expulsion of the Jesuits, the Guaraní missions were transformed into a paradigmatic experiment of the new Bourbon colonialism, which aligned the main ideologies of enlightened reformism and border reformism (Lucena, 1996).[8] The governor of Buenos Aires, Francisco de Paula Bucarelli (1766-1771), who was also responsible for carrying out the expulsion of the Jesuits from the jurisdictions under his control, was in charge of designing the regulations for the new era of administration, government and assimilation of the mission population. The government's "Instructions" for the Guaraní missions were based partly on the ordinances created by Pombaline reformism for the Amazonian indigenous peoples previously administered by the Jesuits (Maeder, 1987). This adaptation, which revealed a common ideological basis, responded to the governor's need to develop ordinances that would guarantee the transition, over just a few months, from the religious administration associated

[6] The change in livestock exploitation occurred due to the uncontrolled expansion of cattle for hide and clandestine round-ups of steer from the missions for Brazilian mining markets, setting the pace of a livestock industry that was essentially for personal consumption, was speculative and predatory, and was focused on the Atlantic markets (Moraes, 2007).

[7] In this regard, Sara Ortelli proposes a broader methodological perspective on the study of the economic practices of indigenous populations based on methodological alternatives that shed light on "certain gaps difficult to grasp through the documentation that is regularly utilized in economic history" (Ortelli, 2011, p. 4).

[8] After the expulsion of the Jesuits, the thirty reductions were kept under the same regime but divided into two districts, that of Paraná and that of Uruguay, within the jurisdiction of Buenos Aires. In 1774, new groupings were created, with the towns made subordinate to the departments of Santiago, Candelaria, San Miguel, Yapeyú and Concepción. With the Royal Ordinance of Intendants, the departments of Santiago and Candelaria became dependent on Paraguay, and the departments of Yapeyú, Concepción and San Miguel became dependent on the Intendancy of Buenos Aires. The occupation of the department of San Miguel by Portugal in 1801 marked a watershed that intensified with the general impact produced in this territory by the independence wars.

with the old regime to another, more enlightened and modern regime. For Bucarelli, this management, which had an unforeseen impact in Río de la Plata and the mission district, was but a negligible step in his military career. As a military nobleman with traditional training, he resented the oversight of the Viceroy of Peru, Manuel de Amat y Junyent, the latter being "more modern" than he was.[9]

In spite of everything, he was able to translate into the ordinances the new ideals of social organization with physiocratic tendencies, which were adapted to a mercantilist, centralist and royalist colonial model for the purpose of introducing "free trade," gaining access to communal goods and collecting taxes.[10] For this purpose, the productive, navigational and demographic control of a broad region populated by one of the largest indigenous conglomerates in the viceroyalty was to remain under the absolute sphere of influence of the Spanish crown. Free trade that was broad and fluid was seen as a necessary step in the evolution of modern states, a new cult that would bring wellbeing to the different juridical-social strata and that through fiscal means would bolster the royal coffers. The new commercial policy that, in the region in question, would assume its general form after the creation of the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata was overturned through an architecture built on Bucarelli's ordinances for the missions. In this regard, the governor claimed that they were elaborated:

> Desiring as a consequence of everything that said natives, with the freedom they have recovered, achieve free trade with the surrounding provinces, through which they will not only become civilized and enjoy the benefits of rational society, but will also gain the advantages and utilities of making use of the fruits that nature produces for them.[11]

Trade without theoretical restrictions would be constituted on the basis of all the projected transformations for this new phase of Iberian colonialism in the region.[12] However, its application in this case would require certain adaptations. On one hand, with regard to the exchange currency:

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[9] After the expulsion of the Jesuits from the mission region, Bucarelli wrote to the Count of Aranda, president of the Council of Castile, requesting that he release him for "among other dislikes, being under the orders of a viceroy who is more modern than I at all levels and in a government as subaltern as this one after the distinguished authorities I had in Spain" (*Carta de Francisco de Paula Bucarelli y Ursúa al señor conde de Aranda*, 1768, p. 10v).

[10] In this case, the concept of "free trade" precedes the "Regulation on Free Trade" (1778) developed by Carlos III to permit free commercial exchange between Spain and its American colonies, which was previously cut off by the monopoly existing in certain ports or mercantile zones. It considered the economic doctrines assiduously disseminated from Europe and the recent successes in North America (Wallerstein, 2004, p. 303).

[11] "Instruction to be made by the interim Governors that I shall name in the Indian towns of Uruguay and Paraná, there being no contrary disposition of His Majesty Francisco Bucarelli y Ursúa, Candelaria, August 23rd, 1768" (Bravo, 1872, p. 324).

[12] Sacred commerce was also conceived in the ordinances as a mode of communication and friendship between states as a way of transcending mere subsistence, as a way of accumulating goods and in turn property and inheritance, as an axis for strengthening the family as a new social foundation, and as the highest expression of freedom of action by individuals, societies and states.

> The currency not being in circulation in the towns of Uruguay and Paraná, as it is not yet possessed in the Spanish cities closest to said towns, it is necessary that in the meantime they carry out trade in the same way that they do, swapping and trading the fruits they gather for the items they need (Bravo, 1872, p. 325).

On the other hand, modifications would have to be imposed in the way they would materialize. In this regard, although Bucarelli emphasized that freedom was "the soul of commerce," the benefits of "reciprocal trade" between the Guarani and Hispanics were only possible given the "genius," "character" and "aptitude" of the "natives" through political and administrative mediation. From this paternalistic and colonialist perspective, "complete freedom" would be "fatal and prejudicial" for the Guaraní in the towns, who had to be "sheltered by following laws for adults that do not make sense." The "indispensable intervention" would be done through Hispanic administrators who would watch over their "goods and contracts" with "zeal and integrity." One of the highlighted aspects was that to form a commercial contract at a "fair price," the parties were required to be able to speak, read, write and count in Spanish. As the majority of the population spoke only Guaraní, not only was freedom impossible, but Spanish was also to be taught "to the youth," and the use of their own language was prohibited by teachers paid with the fruits of the community. The other primary issue was that lack of practical knowledge would lead the "Indians" to be adversely affected by the "natural cunning and sagacity of all merchants" and even that of the Spaniards and Creoles with whom they would now coexist (Bravo, 1872, p. 326). For this, the ordinances stipulated the establishment of a system of mutual controls.[13]

Oversight would be carried out, on one hand, by the indigenous council of each of the thirty towns, with special interference by the Guaraní *corregidor* (mayor) and in extraordinary circumstances the protector of natives, a Spanish administrator who would supervise the system in case of imbalances, conflicts or denunciations. On the other hand, oversight was carried out by Hispanic administrators in each reduction, including departmental lieutenant governors, a general governor of the missions and a general administrator in Buenos Aires, "manager of the businesses of the indians and dative guardian of their goods," who with a preliminary deposit would ultimately manage the whole system, not only receiving all the registers of commercial activity in the towns but also making general decisions based on a profit percentage (Bravo, 1872, p. 337). Complex engineering was established to supervise and oversee transactions, fix the value of goods, and evaluate which products to sell and buy according to the productive specificity of each town and the necessities and conveniences of the community. Meanwhile, it sought to coordinate the exchange of agricultural products, livestock, hides and manufactured goods with the neighboring provinces of Asunción,

[13] This mutual control pointed to commercial practice itself but also to the storing of goods in communal warehouses that remained locked, the keys being in the possession of the *corregidor* and *mayordomo* (both from the indigenous *cabildo*, or town council) and the Spanish administrator.

Corrientes, Buenos Aires and Santa Fe.[14] This was aimed at invigorating the internal market, redirecting the regional benefits previously amassed by the Jesuits toward the metropolis through the productive potential of the towns. To regulate this exchange, district lieutenants were named, and they served under the supervision of the general intendancy of Buenos Aires and the governor general of the missions. Finally, the communal funds of the town would pay the salaries of the employees and the taxes.

Bucarelli, however, weighed the possibility of forming local-level alliances for the purchase and sale of products while skirting Buenos Aires' controls. In this sense, the concern was both the evasion of sales tax payments to the public treasury and the absence of a satisfactory negotiation regarding the objectives of achieving mission self-sufficiency. Also worrisome was the loss of control over the "hire" of indigenous labor for transporting individuals in canoes and carriages without proper wage payments. Finally, it was unsettling that merchants were constantly entering the towns, interrupting the productive logic. The underlying problem consisted of the deep-rootedness of regionalized powers that limited metropolis' access to the potential extractive benefits of their American colonies. Bourbon centralism, represented here by Bucarelli, sought to undo this system of restricted intermediations in the context of major changes in ideas about government. Expectations about this change were placed on a new model of bureaucracy, one that was loyal to royal interests and would ideally oversee the population for tax, labor and productive purposes and limit the impacts of local political dynamics on conflicts of interest among colonial officials.

Disputes Over Resources and Cross-Accusations

The policy of commercial openness, implemented under a false renewal of the conditions, links and freedoms gained by the indigenous population of the towns, brought multiple imbalances and declines. Far from being a source of wellbeing, it affected the basic conditions of subsistence. On one hand, the mission population, in the presence of new social actors, became fragmented as an internally structured community and diversified its responses to the new routes of access to products and the introduction of new goods. In this regard, during Jesuit times, the missions were structured around an economy of commercial exchange controlled by the missionaries,

[14] The commercialization of yerba, tobacco, sugar, honey, linen and cattle from the towns in exchange for domestic essentials, such as clothing, tools, salt and oil, would be done by merchants entering the towns or through the shipment of products to or from the administration of Buenos Aires and vice versa via waterways. The merchants could only enter the towns in the months of February through April so as not to interfere with the harvests and other labor overseen by administrators (Bravo, 1872, p. 324; *Informe solicitado por el superintendente general, Francisco de Paula Sanz, sobre la introducción de bebidas y efectos de comercio en los Pueblos de Misiones guaraníes*, 1788 and 1789).

in which gaps existed for trade outside the environment of the reductions.[15] The change lay in the fact that according to Bucarelli's ordinances, the purchase and sale of products was installed as a central axis of the economy, marked daily ties, broadened the sphere of interaction with other spaces, put mission goods in play—particularly cattle resources, as well as land—and divided society. On the other hand, the administrative leadership did not channel an idealized framework of mutual benefits.[16]

Conflicts between the different government and administrative powers for control over economic benefits and political privileges grew after the creation of the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata in 1776, and with the decree of free trade. The first symptom was an extensive dispute between the administrator general for economic affairs, Juan Angel de Lascano, in Buenos Aires, and the governor of the missions for political and military issues, Francisco Bruno de Zabala, who was based in the town of Candelaria. The conflict expressed rivalries and personal interests as well as disagreements with Buenos Aires, as the capital of the new viceroyalty, for establishing a centralized logic of obedience where regional political powers had long taken precedence. In this way, the missions, in addition to concentrating extensive resources coveted by the surrounding society, formed a scenario of political struggles where encountered governances were dissolved.[17] For its part, the mission territory assumed greater visibility with the Límites Expedition, derived from the Treaty of San Ildefonso (1777), which began the task of demarcation in the early 1780s.[18] Finally, struggles over the definition of benefits and interference in the mission space intensified with the creation of the royal intendancies in 1784.

Within this context, in 1785 the new intendant governor in Buenos Aires, Francisco de Paula Sanz, developed ordinances to reinforce the control and supervision of commercial activities in the towns.[19] Three years later, he requested the three

[15] On the other hand, trade as the exchange of goods by people outside the group and through shared transactional codes was an identifiable practice among the societies of the Lowlands, even among rival groups. These practices, coupled with colonial logic, gave rise to the so-called "rescues" in Río de la Plata. Meanwhile, within the realm of the Jesuit reductions, certain levels of individual exchange continued both within and outside the mission space, beyond the centralization and control of the economy by the religious figures (Haubert, 1991; Susnik, 1965).

[16] It should be clarified that one thing brought about by the new regime of colonial administration was the residence in the missions of new social actors who, due to their prerogatives, lifestyle and economic interests, generated new layers of internal inequality and new forms of violence.

[17] Guillermo Wilde (2009) analyzes this issue in particular. In this regard, he examines a visit to the towns in 1775 by order of the governor of Buenos Aires, Juan José de Vértiz y Salcedo, in which the friars consulted referred extensively to the overlapping of political jurisdictions inside and outside the towns (Wilde, 2009).

[18] The treaty was signed to resolve border rivalries with the Portuguese, who were added as competitive actors in the Río de la Plata area.

[19] The main adversary of Buenos Aires' centrist policy was Governor Zabala. In this regard, Sanz wrote in a letter to him that:

> Because of the disagreements between Vm and the lieutenant governors of the departments of San Miguel and Concepción, having originated from one and the other the universal disorder of these towns according to what has been recounted to me and not permitting its continuation, I warn you for the second time to abstain from intervening and mixing directly or indirectly with the knowledge of communal goods of said seventeen towns under your care, freely leaving their administrators to manage them subject to the orders and methods (*Carta de Francisco de Paula Sanz al Sr. Gobernador de los Pueblos de Misiones*, 1786, p. 2v).

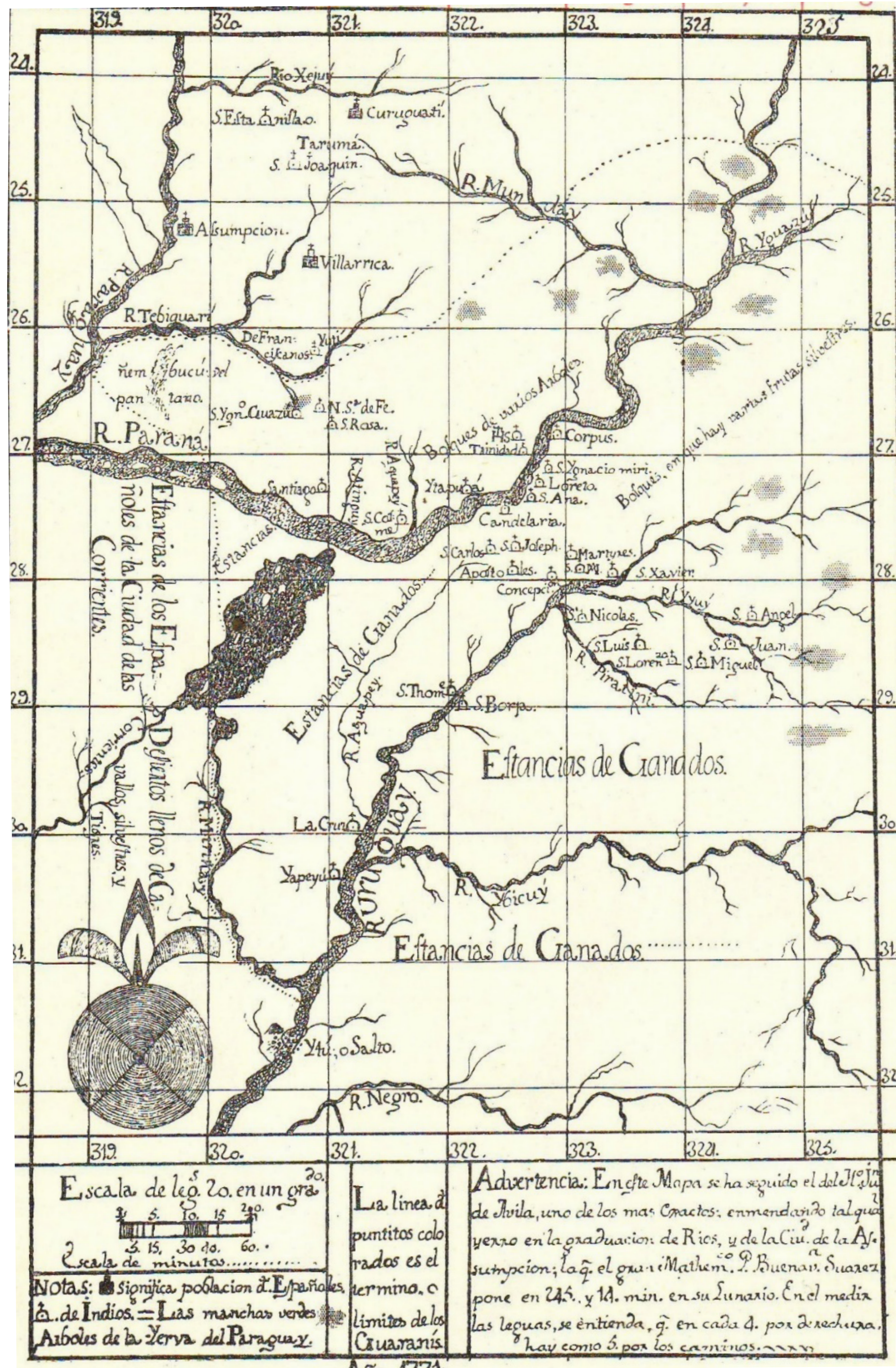
departmental government lieutenants to report in detail on the "profits or losses experienced by the natives of the towns" in the purchasing of different products, as "at some time and without any intermediation, different merchants come to this area bringing bills for clothing and other effects" (*Informe solicitado por el superintendente general, Francisco de Paula Sanz, sobre la introducción de bebidas y efectos de comercio en los Pueblos de Misiones guaraníes*, 1788 and 1789, page 1). Of particular concern were untaxed exchange, which implied tax evasion; the introduction of unauthorized beverages; and the acquisition of products on an individual basis, without abiding by rules regarding price and quality. The responses to the request captured the competition over resources between the administration in Buenos Aires, the governor of Missions, the departmental government lieutenants, the administrators of the towns and the Guaraní *corregidores* through cross-accusations made between them. However, they also described the multiple activities and modalities generated by commercial openness and through which indigenous agency, despite the constant denial of it, was indirectly mentioned.[20]

The reports requested by Sanz regarding potential losses due to the excessive presence of merchants in the towns were diverse and marked contrasting positions; they represented a range from radical positions regarding the damage suffered, to more conciliatory opinions, to total defense of the acquisition of goods through merchants based on their association with the wellbeing of the towns. The two antagonistic views, controlled mercantilism and open mercantilism, were at once represented by subjects aligned, respectively, with a centralized government in Buenos Aires in opposition to an autonomous mission government. The first group included the lieutenant governors of San Miguel and of Concepción, Manuel de Lasarte y Esquivel and Gonzalo de Doblas. The departments were separated by the Uruguay River, and their towns were near the border with the Portuguese. An intermediate position, more conciliatory, was expressed by the lieutenant governor of Yapeyú, Pedro Castellanos, who was in charge of the southern towns located along the Paraná and Uruguay rivers and those of the ranches that extended from the Uruguay River toward the Atlantic, which were rich in cattle. Finally, the defense of the free entry of merchants into the towns was sustained insistently by the governor of missions, Francisco Bruno de Zabala. The governor had initiated his mandate in 1769 with jurisdiction over the thirty towns; after that initial concentration, his jurisdiction was steadily reduced by Buenos Aires to curtail and fragment his power within the mission district (Figure 1).[21]

[20] The alleged "incapacity of the Indians" was the mechanism of domination that sought to obstruct free access by the mission population to the new mercantile system in a context of the freeing of economic relations.

[21] After the creation of the viceroyalty, its chief representative, Pedro de Ceballos, requested reports on the state of the towns, as did the governor of Buenos Aires, Juan José de Vértiz y Salcedo. Although their results were alarming, the most concrete measures pointed to cutting the jurisdiction and power of the governor of missions, Francisco Bruno de Zabala, and replacing the administrators who had been denounced for embezzlement. To a large extent, there was an attempt to displace Zabala from the local control he had over the economic affairs of the missions in a dispute that originated with the then general administrator of Buenos Aires, Juan Angel de Lascano. Zabala remained as governor of Missions, although with less authority than he enjoyed initially, until his death in 1800.

Figure 1: Map of the Guaraní reductions, 1771



Source: Furlong (1936).

To defend their positions, they appealed to sensationalist associations that dramatized the profits or losses from the free circulation of merchants in the towns. Although none recognized the sale of beverages, which did occur, the strongest detractors described the sale of merchandise in exchange for the "fruits of the country" as a "plague and ruin." From the start, Manuel de Lasarte y Esquivel, lieutenant governor of San Miguel, insisted that losses from inadequate sales of products could be avoided by "circulating this capital in the communities or places that benefit from their profits" (*Respuestas al "Informe" de Manuel de Lasarte y Esquivel*, 1788, pp. 1v, 2 and 2v.). In this regard, he explained that "the communities of Indians are exempt from the duties paid by the Spaniards to get products out of the capital" and that as "every merchant charges their negotiation services, it is detrimental to the communities to buy these loads, especially when the goods have already been passed from second and third hands from one town to another." Likewise, he clarified that:

> Although they come with what may be of use to the Indians, at the same time, they bring things that make them idle and unproductive and many that given a precise consideration of the condition and situation of the towns are luxurious and profane and should be avoided with due consideration (*Respuestas al "Informe" de Manuel de Lasarte y Esquivel,* 1788, pp. 1v, 2 and 2v).

Based on this, he stressed the need to sustain "a narrow, invariable succession of dependencies under the responsibility of the *corregidores*, *cabildos* [town councils], administrators" (*Respuestas al "Informe" de Manuel de Lasarte y Esquivel*, 1788, p. 2v). The reference to a succession of controls was an argument used to defend the idea that lieutenant governors should be the ones to oversee compliance. In line with this thinking was Gonzalo de Doblas, lieutenant governor of Concepción, who recalled that "the ordinances establish that merchants should enter from February to April, but they have entered and continue to enter at all times," and "as much zeal as there is, they must fool the Indians, cause distractions, and have illicit alliances." He stated that the merchants "largely maintain themselves at the cost of the towns, and when they finally leave, they take Indians, boys and even Indian women, removing them from the towns, never to return again." As a solution, he proposed "the absolute prohibition of merchants with their wares in these towns, allowing only those that bring cattle and horses" and that "the administrators not buy anything for the consumption of the community from those that may come from Buenos Aires."[22]

Taking an intermediate position, the lieutenant governor of Yapeyú, Pedro Castellanos, stated that sales were to be carried out with "equity of price in exchange for cattle and hides resulting from the beef cattle that are killed for consumption by the community," and only with his authorization (*Respuestas al "Informe" de Pedro Castellanos*, n.d., p. 3). This obscured unregulated commercial practices and above all a lack of adaptation to the criteria for the preservation and reproduction of

[22] The goods acquired most frequently were wax, paper, oil, vinegar, iron, steel, tools, ponchos, hats, handkerchiefs, breeches, wool, cotton, sugar, honey, spices and salt (*Respuestas al "Informe" de Gonzalo de Doblas*, 1788, pp. 4 and 8v).

cattle. Finally, the governor of Missions, Francisco Bruno de Zabala, connected the acquisition of commercial products with “the happiness and abundance of said towns” and remarked on the “importance of free trade” without mediation because:

> What is brought to be sold to them will stimulate these natives to apply themselves to work and labor, and above all, they will not lack supplies and the abundance and supply of the country, as has occurred in the other kingdoms, and hence, those who are able will take advantage of the occasion and in communities that can never be supplied with everything they need will be able to find a better way to provide for themselves. For the towns do not have any surplus to store for general restocking to which shipments are added, and meanwhile they must pay the merchants while their dependents remain in the towns and among their neighbors, protecting them from risk when they do not wish to be exposed to it, freeing them from delays and the expenses of transit, and achieving deals with the Spaniards for the means of which there are many advanced Indians. The alliances and sacred bonds I have sheltered will endure because they are the way in which they understand that they are treated no differently from any other of His Majesty’s vessels (*Carta de Francisco Bruno de Zabala al virrey Nicolás de Arredondo*, 1790, p. 16).

Zabala possessed a deeper knowledge of regional dynamics and the details of exchange in the mission region than many other officials who had arrived in the Americas more recently.[23] He also possessed information about the complexities involved and practices derived from the commercial transactions, such as the issue of waterways, for which they relied on the mission populations; vessels deteriorated, costs increased, and the arrival of products was delayed. However, his arguments obscured personal interests, as with his insistence on free exchange with the merchants, which he defined as “sacred bonds” but which related to dealings he had with them (Hernández, 1999; Maeder, 1992). This fact, added to the ideology of “assimilating” the indigenous population into colonial society as a supposed act of equality, took on another dimension upon observing mutual accusations. In this regard, Doblas in his allegations referred to the management of commerce by administrators and merchants in terms of a “monopoly” consolidated under the shelter of Governor Zabala and sustained, together with Lasarte y Esquivel, the importance of the general administration for the purpose of controlling commercial circulation in the missions. In their defense, the administrators of the towns, who were also consulted, pointed to the Guaraní *corregidores* as the principal agents of this exchange.[24] For his part, Zabala,

[23] Francisco Bruno de Zabala was the son of the Spaniard Bruno Mauricio de Zabala, governor of Buenos Aires (1717-1734). He had participated with the Spanish troops who joined the Límites Expedition (1753), which was formed to put into practice the Treaty of Madrid (1750), as well as the army that fought the resistance of the towns and the Jesuits to leaving seven of their reductions under the orders of the treaty. Finally, he was among the captains and soldiers who occupied the eastern towns for several years after the Battle of Caybaté (Bruno, 1991; Maeder, 1992; Quarleri, 2009).

[24] Pedro Fontela, the administrator of the town of Concepción, in response to the request said that if “the natives” had “dealings with merchants,” it was without his consent, and that “the first contravener in this issue is the *corregidor*” (*Respuestas al “Informe” del administrador Pedro Fontela,* 1788, p. 8).

faced with the general administration, had previously been questioned, first by the intendant governor of Buenos Aires, Francisco de Paula Sanz, and later by Viceroy Arredondo for not having:

> Yet executed said report; however, the time that has passed since it was offered has seemed to me to recall it while at the same time preventing me from being told with all clarity and reason whether or not the introduction of goods and effects of commerce prohibited by this superintendancy is convenient for the benefit of the towns (*Carta de Nicolás Arredondo al gobernador de Misiones,* 1790, p. 12v.).

Following the Viceroy's intimation, Zabala provided an extensive response, in which he included Gonzalo de Doblas in a dispute that transcended the discussion regarding the wellbeing of the mission population, insisting on:

> The importance of free trade and the private interests that move to weigh the losses that with good intention and by obligation can be avoided and contained given proper union and subordination, which is necessary on the part of the lieutenants governor, and that these abstain from executing what Gonzalo de Doblas has been linked to in purchases and sales by negotiation, as confirmed in the secret inquiry that I created and remitted in the original based on orders from above (*Carta de Francisco Bruno de Zabala al virrey Nicolás de Arredondo*, 1790, p. 15).

Additionally, he justified delays, such as the ungovernability of the territory due to the rupture in the obedience system and a lack of collaborators, alleging the need to have "an advisor, a secretary, a lieutenant protector of natives, and that these are Indians with which I have a lot of work" (*Carta de Francisco Bruno de Zabala al virrey Nicolás de Arredondo*, 1790, p. 15). Both the exploitation of communal goods by sectorial efforts and control of the circulation of goods from the viceregal capital expressed substantive political power over commercial exchange in a way that was similar to the forced distribution of goods imposed in Indian towns in the central areas of the Hispanic American viceroyalties. In this way, the model of mercantilist interventionism in the missions represented one of many contradictions in the modernizing project of the Bourbon reforms because based on the notion of commercial openness, it maintained systems of political, economic and punitive coercion to stimulate the internal market, generate sectorial benefits, sustain the bureaucracy and add to the royal treasury.[25] The mercantile expansion generated commercial alliances between ethnic authorities, Spanish officials and merchants that provoked changes in the dynamics of communal production and the incorporation of new forms of consumption and modalities of participation in commercial markets.

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[25] In this sense, as Guillermo Madrazo states, "the priority given to the economic objectives of the metropolis implied that the modernizing project would be undertaken with 'political and social payment of doubtful character,'" especially with regard to the indigenous towns (Madrazo, 2005, p. 30).

Reappropriations, Differential Logic and Indigenous Agency

One of the paradoxes of the new economic model was the implementation of free trade that was also linked to the need to maintain the administrative bureaucracy created to trade with the towns. This circularity was a result of the intention to appropriate the energy, goods and lands of one of the most important productive and human communities existing in the region. On one hand, regulations that were developed to organize commercial exchange acted as a legal framework of reference only in the discursive sense. Based on the requested reports, daily political and economic realities were instead structured around constant adaptations and the alleged differences between the towns, as well as their state of poverty, lack of provisions, high costs, level of disobedience, complicities and monopolies.

On the other hand, although the commercialization of goods was accompanied by official documentation, which emphasized ideas associated with "regulating consumption," "valuation," "precaution," "utility," "justice," "equanimity", "order" and "equity," the reiteration of these notions without a change in policy expressed incongruences between the ideological foundations and the resulting economic dynamics. This situation also reflected a form of domination built on the gap between protectionist discourse and the governmental methods instituted to oversee the population and its resources. The model, although it foresaw ways of overseeing the movement of goods; establishing accounting records, trading periods, and types of routes and transport; selecting marketable goods for each town; and evaluating the quality of goods to be acquired, did not entail a comprehensive vision. Two decades after the implementation of the system, Gonzalo de Doblas stated that exchange, consumption and supply existed in the missions with "neither rule, nor economy" (*Respuestas al "Informe" de Gonzalo de Doblas*, 1788, p. 4).

One of the aspects that emerges is the contrast between modalities and cultural ideas of consumption from the Bourbon perspective: rationality combined with a lack of control. From the first reports, observations were made in relation to the notion that the Guaraní "spent" their resources until "they ran out." However, the logic of stockpiling goods in warehouses and the subsequent distribution responded to policies that the Jesuits had imposed on the predominant consumption practices among the Guaraní reductions. The Jesuits, in their chronicles, noted the discrepancies mentioned and the implementation of a system of daily deliveries of rations, particularly beef and clothing, as a means of sustaining a daily presence in the towns. This practice continued after the expulsion on feast days and during "*faenas*" (collective work projects) as a transitory policy. The objective was to replace it with incentives for family production and the effects derived from the commercial impulse itself. However, the equation was not seen in practice, and the rations as a mainstay of access to basic goods were not substituted. The problem was that cattle and other goods began to decline, and rations were increasingly scarce, generating a food crisis. Added to this was the lack of local production of cotton for making clothes and the gradual deterioration of homes.

As no currency had been coined, cotton had since Jesuit times been the primary means of exchange and of payment of salaries and perks. This generated greater

labor pressures in the post-expulsion period, particularly for women, who had since the origins of the reductions been responsible for spinning yarn. This was expressed in an increase in weekly quotas by administrators and lieutenant governors. Cotton shortages and the imposition of obligations changed the capacity for production. In a report after his visit to several towns, the governor of Missions, Francisco Bruno Zabala, observed that:

> The Indian women, due to the three tasks of spinning that they are given each week, do not have time to make any cloth with which to dress themselves and their children, nor to help their husbands on their *chacras* [farms], which are abandoned when they go to work in the town, and they do not have enough to feed themselves properly (*Visita a San Apóstoles de Francisco Bruno de Zabala, capitán de Regimiento de Dragones de Buenos Aires y gobernador de los Treinta Pueblos*, de 1787, p. 3).

These imputations crystallized the crisis of the economic system of the missions, as well as the damage manifested by the "husbands" regarding their wives' rights to work, even the wives of *caciques*, in a relationship of gendered subjugation and domination where pre-Hispanic traditions were juxtaposed as Western models of Jesuit and colonial Iberian origin.[26] The supply crisis, caused by a lack of production and investment and to embezzlement, deepened, in turn, as a consequence of the incongruences derived from the commercial practices carried out by Hispanic officials.[27] One of these consisted of the purchase of ribbons, ponchos and hats in exchange for bulls and oxen and the purchase of the latter "with urgency and bad price" based on the argument that they were essential for working the land (*Respuestas al "Informe" del administrador Pedro Fontela*, 1788, p. 8). Cotton, on the other hand, was obtained in exchange for yerba, generating greater pressure on the work of indigenous women in the mate plantations, especially in the towns of the Intendancy of Paraguay. In this way, they began to buy products that were previously produced internally in exchange for community goods that they would come to need later.[28]

The production of goods in the wheat fields and on the mate plantations and the tasks of spinning were structured around a punitive system based on physical punishment. In this context, in January 1788, the cacique of the Guaraní town of San Lorenzo announced before the Hispanic authorities of the mission complex that his

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[26] A first approach to this problem was presented in the paper "Violencia física y control de los cuerpos: trabajo, género y poder en pueblos indígenas fronterizos de fines del siglo xviii" (Quarleri, 2017).

[27] It should be clarified that the administrators who responded to the report requested by Intendant Governor Francisco de Paula Sanz (Pedro Nolasco Alfaro of San Carlos, Francisco Martínez Lobato of San José, Miguel de Pereyra of Apóstoles, Thomas Gómez of Santos Mártires, Pedro Antonio Nieto of San Javier, Domingo Bermúdez of Santa María La Mayor, and Pedro Fontela of Concepción) mostly recognized that the merchants sold products to the Guaraní on a private basis but stated that they did so without their knowledge.

[28] Zabala stated that what was most scarce was cotton, "being able to have it from the harvests" (*Visita a San Nicolás de Francisco Bruno de Zabala, capitán de Regimiento de Dragones de Buenos Aires y gobernador de los Treinta Pueblos*, 1787, p. 3).

wife, María Irapayu, had been "beaten on the backside" as a form of punishment by order of the indigenous *corregidor* after missing one day of work on the wheat harvest, the harvest being part of her communal obligations (*Provisión del teniente de gobernador de este Departamento de San Miguel, Don Manuel de Lasarte y Esquivel, por la queja dada por el cacique Don Agustín Guairaye, pueblo de la Real Corona titulado San Nicolás de Bari*, 1788). The lieutenant governor, at odds with the *corregidor* of that reduction and the governor of the thirty missions, presented additional testimony showing that other women had also been whipped as a form of punishment for being absent from the corn harvest. This was not an isolated case. On the contrary, there were constant accusations, generating an extensive body of documentation, after which the "need" to regulate punishment was raised. Authorities established a typology of punitive practices, such as incarceration and flogging, and instituted frameworks of legitimate action that only served to normalize physical violence as a disciplinary mechanism for the purposes of the production model.[29]

Within this context, the "flight" of the people was one of the most forceful responses to the coercion they experienced. However, because the escapees were punished, the resistance also expressed itself strategically in everyday actions, especially in the sphere of work and commerce. This was manifested, in part, through the reappropriation of certain practices of exchange and access to goods that inverted and displaced the objectives implicit in the political economy expressed by Bucarelli in his ordinances.[30] In this regard, while this policy was based on the negation of the indigenous capacity to intervene in commercial dealings with merchants or other agents in the mission space, indigenous participation was channeled by rejecting certain strategies associated with family productivity and coercive and abusive work through the generation of their own commercial practices. One of the main viewpoints that was resisted was that of Western economic "rationality" for the stockpiling and distribution of consumer goods.[31] While this opposition was related to the old Jesuit practices of stockpiling and distribution, it was made even more apparent under the new Bourbon mercantile economic policy, as the latter emphasized the benefits of the purchase and sale of products, in contrast to the delivery of daily rations.

Another aspect that was opposed was control over access to dairy farms, the consumption of livestock, and the commercialization of cattle and hides by the

[29] Through a royal charter in 1778, it was established that "in punishments for the faults and errors committed by the Indians regarding the *haciendas*, town works and the construction of *chacras*, no more intervention should be given but to report these to the *corregidor* and the *cabildo*, requesting remedy with moderate punishment" (*Reglas para el mejor gobierno de los guaraníes*, 1788, p. 4v.).

[30] Julia Sarreal, in her book on the economy of the missions, infers based on economic documentation that, as of the 1780s, the independent acquisition of goods for daily consumption had acquired prominence over production on communal lands. Practices used to gain access to foodstuffs included the hunting of wild game and the gathering of yerba mate in the forest; at the same time, there was a decline in cotton cultivation, which was widely resisted by the Guaraní (Sarreal, 2014).

[31] Ideas about wellbeing, the proper use of time, exchange and consumption had been the subject of tensions since Jesuit times. The same was true of the exchange of goods, because although these exchanges were supervised by the Jesuits, there were cases in which the Guaraní traded products with their neighbors, the Charrúa, the Guenoa or the Portuguese, with various objectives (Catafesto, 2002; Meliá & Temple, 2004; Quarleri, 2013).

general administration or the local government, particularly in ranching towns such as Yapeyú and San Miguel.[32] The open rejection of interference in livestock resources by Bourbon officials manifested in 1778 in the well-known "Mutiny of Yapeyú."[33] Meanwhile, cattle smuggling was the principal counterpoint to the ideal of commerce promoted by the Bourbon administration from Buenos Aires, given that it constituted the main source of wealth in the Rio de la Plata area and the most valuable asset in commercial exchange (Caletti, 2015; Moraes, 2007).

"Clandestine commerce," as the Hispanic authorities called it, was the enemy of "enlightened commerce," which was based on the openness of deals with surrounding provinces controlled from the viceregal capital. In the case of the Jesuit missions, trade was instituted across borders by virtue of existing passages and ports as well as by proximity to the Portuguese forts and the surrounding multiethnic settlements. This trade was achieved at the expense of "the best cattle that serve their conservation and development" to sell hides, fats and fodder (*Carta del Virrey marques de Loreto a Francisco Bruno de Zabala*, 1788, p. 11v). Local and transatlantic demand for leather constituted the basis of this persistent trade. Trade was also done with horses from the ranches in each town.[34] The ranches of the southern towns were especially prone to disputes with Creole colonists who occupied bordering strips of land, and also to the constant looting of cattle by both criminals and "escaped" Guaraní who would later sell the cattle to the Portuguese.

However, the central issue that concerned the general administration and that had motivated Sanz' report was that, despite all the speculation and systems of control, merchants entered the towns whenever they wanted and traded directly with the population. Private acquisitions were more common in some reductions than others. This was related to their location—some being transit points and others being distant—as well as the position taken by administrators and *corregidores* and the availability of surpluses for trade coming primarily from family *chacras* [farms]. The merchants usually offered products on account, generating future debts, in exchange for various tasks that guaranteed their continued presence in the towns, or also in exchange for cattle, hides, yerba mate and linen. In their defense, administrators claimed they did not know when these exchanges were conducted.[35] They also insisted on the difficulty of controlling private acquisitions, arguing that these were

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[32] Erich Edgard Poetniz, in a work published in 1983, provides a detailed analysis of the economy of Yapeyú, a town that had the largest cattle reserves in the mission complex. Making note of the changes that occurred in the post-Jesuit period, the author states that while Yapeyú initially provided income that satisfied the general administration of Buenos Aires, in 1784 that income began to decline because the residents preferred to negotiate directly with merchants arriving from Paraguay (Poetniz, 1983).

[33] In November 1778, the lieutenant governor of Yapeyú, Juan de San Martín, ordered the establishment of a dairy farm to bring wild cattle to the mission ranches. The individual in charge of creating it, the *cacique* and second mayor, Melchor Aberá, did not do so and was jailed. This was met with an uprising by several *caciques*, after which Viceroy Vértiz intervened (Hernández, 1999).

[34] Manuel de Lasarte y Esquivel stated that some native Indians from San Juan and San Nicolás were accused of stealing horses from the ranch in San Nicolás to bring to the port of San Juan and from there to the ranch in San Borja. From this town, trade was carried out with the Portuguese in Río Pardo (*Carta del teniente de gobernador Manuel de Lasarte y Esquivel a Francisco de Paula Sanz*, 1788, p. 11v.).

[35] It was "an old custom they had regarding sales by individuals in town about which I more than repeatedly advised them to inform me" (*Respuestas al "Informe" del administrador Miguel de Pereyra*, 1788, p. 7).

carried out behind their backs.[36] This argument was reiterated by the administrator of Concepción, who stated that "if the natives have had dealings with the merchants it is without the administrator's knowledge, despite the fact that he has let them know in their own language" (*Respuestas al "Informe" del administrador Pedro Fontela*, 1788, p. 8v.). In general terms, the idea was established that the purchases were made in secret to divert suspicion away from administrators and indigenous *corregidores*, but at the same time, the existence of such purchases was confirmed.

From another sphere, the lieutenant governor of the department of Concepción, Gonzalo de Doblas, recognized that the Guaraní constantly carried out individual commercial dealings but remarked that they concealed the purchases "so that it would not be known that they were not as poor as they appeared, so that the community will assist them" ("*Informe" de Gonzalo de Doblas*, 1788, p. 4). In contrast, Zabala defended individual purchases and stated, "if they buy in secret, it is not to hide poverty and be provisioned by the stored goods because this is for the neediest." For the governor, the purchases were linked to a "natural desire to acquire" that, although questionable, demonstrated that purchases of goods were made independently of political control and were based on individual decisions and needs triggered by the loss of capacity in communal production, as well as the new conception of consumption and the value of certain goods (*Carta de Francisco Bruno de Zabala al virrey Nicolás de Arredondo*, 1790, p. 16v).

This new consumption, as well as responding to colonial influence determined in large part by interethnic coexistence, opened a gap within the towns between the "more Castilian Indians" and those who had not adopted the new "habits and customs" along these lines. Toward the end of the 18th century, the colonial administration distinguished between those who knew how to "negotiate and contract," spoke Spanish and had incorporated other European customs, such as wearing certain clothing. Some of the latter, with previous intervention by administrators and priests in the towns, were freed from communal duties following the decree of Viceroy Aviles in 1800 (*Nominas de naturales propuestos para libertad, elaboradas por administradores y curas de los pueblos*, 1799 and 1800).

Final Considerations

In investigating the ideological foundations of the model of Bourbon intervention in the mission economies, based on the instructions of Governor Bucarelli, we encounter extensive arguments regarding the utopian benefits of free trade among states, provinces and towns. These conceptions belonging to Bucarelli's era, which went beyond his affinity for the reforms led by Viceroy Amat, were clearly designed to be applied in the reductions, despite the enormous paradox that economic freedom was not granted to the Guaraní communities without intermediations. However,

[36] "Without there being things that the Indians would need they would also buy them with their fruits (…) without the administrator being able to remedy them because they hide it, and although I will take all possible care to avoid these contracts (…) I doubt I can avoid them" (*Respuestas al "Informe" del administrador Pedro Nolasco Alfaro*, 1788, p. 6v).

analyzed within a larger context, the commercial openness of the mission towns was not only the result of the idealized plan expressed by Bucarelli in his ordinances; on the contrary, it was a product of the convergence of multiple factors. One of these was the very dynamic that had been developing prior to the expulsion of the Jesuits as a result of demographic growth and the growing demand for livestock resources. Another major element was royal interest in the benefits derived from local resources and labor through their circulation within the internal market, and in the associated tax payments. Also influential was the assimilationist turn of the reformist colonialism of the era, which was weighed against the evaluation that the segregationist policy deployed by preceding monarchies and dynasties was not only in conflict with the new modernizing paradigms but had also demonstrated its ineffectiveness. Finally, it motivated a mercantilist scenario that fueled a contradictory narrative regarding the reign of the colonialist variant of commerce, over which the sectorial interests of the participating actors clashed.

The commercial model in the missions would face not only the reappropriations, rejections and subversions carried out by the Guaraní themselves but also interpretations and adaptations to personal interests carried out by officials in their local and viceregal jurisdictions. From different fronts, they sought to access agricultural resources, livestock, leather and manufactured goods that were previously monopolized by the Jesuits and to open the trade to the neighboring provinces of Asunción, Corrientes, Buenos Aires and Santa Fe. However, Buenos Aires, as a new viceregal headquarters, sought to direct the logic of regional benefits through an unusual intervention. The logic of appropriation was also reproduced in the mission environment. Thus, while the mission departments—which fell under the jurisdiction of the Intendancy of Buenos Aires—argued, based on either strategy or conviction, about the disadvantages brought by the direct contact between the Guaraní and merchants, the governor of the missions, who had the most experience in the Río de la Plata area and took a more regional view of the issue, defended to Buenos Aires the freedom of the contracts and of unrestricted entry into the reductions by neighboring merchants.

From both perspectives—on the one hand, denying the indigenous people the ability to complete commercial transactions with merchants or other agents in the mission space, and, on the other, openly lauding this commerce for its ties with the merchants from neighboring jurisdictions—indigenous participation finally expressed itself on its own terms. In general, the indigenous people channeled this by rejecting certain strategies associated with family productivity and coercive and abusive labor, as well as through the generation of their own commercial practices. One of the main tenets they resisted was that of Western economic "rationality" for the collection, consumption and communal production of certain crops. Individual decisions were prioritized. Another way they expressed their rejection of supervisory guidelines was "clandestine commerce," the primary enemy of "enlightened commerce." In sum, adaptation to the new structures and ties; resistance to old and new practices; individual or family responses within a progressive dismemberment of *cacique* cohesion; and the use of multiethnic commercial circuits, such as the commercialization of cattle, became ever more evident in the face of the blurred boundaries of a fragmented colonial power.

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