

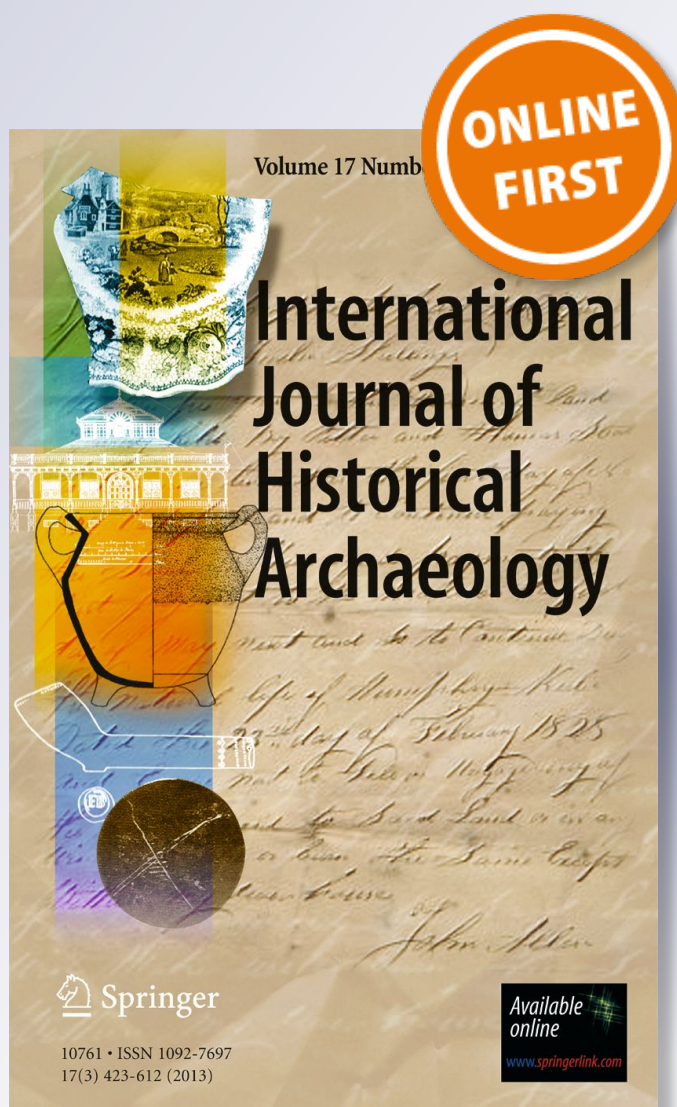
# *Materiality and Indigenous Agency: Limits to the Colonial Order (Argentinean Patagonia, Eighteenth–Nineteenth Centuries)*

**Silvana Buscaglia**

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# Materiality and Indigenous Agency: Limits to the Colonial Order (Argentinean Patagonia, Eighteenth–Nineteenth Centuries)

Silvana Buscaglia<sup>1</sup> 

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**Abstract** This paper highlights the agency of indigenous peoples in the manipulation, alteration, and/or definition of limits to the colonial order established in Patagonia by the end of the eighteenth century. Hence, it rests on the ideas of the ambivalence of power and intercultural relations. Interethnic relationships are explored in two case studies from the same colonizing project: “Nueva Colonia y Fuerte de Floridablanca” (San Julián Bay, Santa Cruz province) and “Fuerte San José” (Valdés peninsula, Chubut province). Social practices, material conditions of the colonial settlements, and particularly, the indigenous perceptions of the colonial posts are thoroughly considered. This information is thus intended to discuss the divergent trajectories of interethnic relationships, as well as to approach colonialism in Patagonia from the natives’ logics.

**Keywords** Materiality · Indigenous agency · Spanish colonialism · Patagonia · Argentina

## Introduction

Academic discussions about the interethnic relationships operating during the colonial period in Atlantic Patagonia are relatively recent as well as limited to the historical archaeology perspective, in contrast with research carried out countrywide. It has resulted in a significant gap—both empirical and epistemological—in the inquiry of the encounter between Europeans and natives, colonialism itself and its related

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✉ Silvana Buscaglia  
silvana\_buscaglia@yahoo.com.ar

<sup>1</sup> Instituto Multidisciplinario de Historia y Ciencias Humanas- CONICET, Saavedra 15, 5° piso, C1083ACA, Ciudad de Buenos Aires, Argentina

materiality in the region. Furthermore, just a few research programs in Argentina go beyond the traditional models of acculturation and domination/resistance to consider the relationships resulting from European colonialism at the far end of South America.

In this context, my own historical and archaeological research has tried to move away from such models to address the complexity inherent to the interethnic contacts during the European colonization of Patagonia. It intends to highlight the active role played by indigenous groups in the colonial order rather than stressing the impact of colonialism on native populations from a unilateral perspective of terminal narratives (Panich 2013). In this sense, I am interested in discussing interethnic relationships on the basis of their heterogeneity, ambivalence, and multidirectional nature, emphasising native agency and questioning the idea of the immutability of colonial structures (e.g., Buscaglia 2011c, 2013; Ferris et al. 2014; Jordan 2014, 2016; Liebmann 2008; Liebmann and Murphy 2011; Lightfoot et al. 1998; Martindale 2009; Orser 1996; Russell 2012; Silliman 2001, 2006, 2010; Van Dommelen 2011; Voss 2008). From this perspective, this article has a twofold aim. On the one hand, it evaluates the strategies used by native agents to manipulate, disrupt, and/or set limits to the colonial order, considering the many subtleties of power and intercultural relations present. I discuss the diverse expressions of these relations during colonial times in Patagonia breaking away from Eurocentric traditional dichotomies (i.e., colonists/dominants/actives versus natives/subordinates/passives), action-reaction models, essentialisms, and acculturation perspectives that have permeated the discussion for ages. In sum, I want to make visible the agency of native actors, who were subalternized by both colonialism and the scientific academia alike.

Following Cooper and Stoler (1997), this article opposes the idea that the “colonial power” was monolithic and universal, by presenting particular situations of the possibilities and limits imposed by both native populations and the colonial materiality and practices deployed at the far end of the Spanish Empire in South America.

On the other hand, my interest rests in comparing the establishment of interethnic relationships in two different scenarios of the same colonizing project. Hence, I introduce and discuss two divergent trajectories, even though the indigenous agents were occasionally the same ethnic group: the *Aónikenk*, or Southern Tehuelches. In this view, both colonialism and colonial relationships are analyzed considering their heterogeneity and peculiarity. It means questioning the explanations which tend to unify the diversity of the process, in terms of the trajectories and experiences of natives and settlers in particular contexts and times (for similar perspectives see Ferris et al. 2014; Jordan 2014; Liebmann and Murphy 2011; Russell 2012; Stein 2005; Van Dommelen and Rowlands 2012; Voss 2015).

The colonial scenarios correspond to two isolated and peripheral colonial settlements known as “Nueva Colonia y Fuerte de Floridablanca” (San Julián bay, Santa Cruz province, Argentina), and the settlement complex made up of the “Fuerte San José” fort and the “Puesto de la Fuente” annex post (Valdés peninsula, Chubut province, Argentina). These archaeological sites have been studied from a historical archaeology perspective since 1998. In Floridablanca, nine field seasons were carried out between 1998 and 2007. Research is still in progress in Fuerte San José and Puesto de la Fuente, with four field seasons completed between 2010 and 2014. Additionally, a large number of historical

sources –both published and unpublished –have been revised to define the functioning of Patagonian colonial settlements and interethnic relationships.

The analysis of these two study cases introduces the discussion of their significance and related materiality considering indigenous perception and logics. I propose that indigenous agents played a key role in structuring interethnic and power relationships in Patagonia at the end of the colonial period. It implies focusing in the way the colonial process was conceptualized and partially controlled by the indigenous inhabitants rather than solely resorting to colonists' practices and natives' reactions. As Russell (2012: 20) states, this is another way to “acknowledge and present Indigenous people as legitimate historical actors and not merely victims of the colonial encounter.”

### Spanish Colonization of the Patagonian Coast and the Policy of Cultural Contact

The peculiar way interethnic relationships were structured in Patagonia at the end of the eighteenth century can be analyzed in the policies and practices of both colonists and indigenous populations. As a consequence of the Bourbon reforms, from the second half of the eighteenth century, Patagonia –a region located at the southernmost corner of South America– gains an outstanding protagonism in the Spanish colonizing expansion. This consolidation of power coincided with the diplomatic crisis between Spain and the British Empire, a situation that would derive toward the end of the century in colonizing projects inspired in the Enlightenment and modernist ideology (e.g., Lynch 1992; Marcos Martín 2000; Senatore 2007).

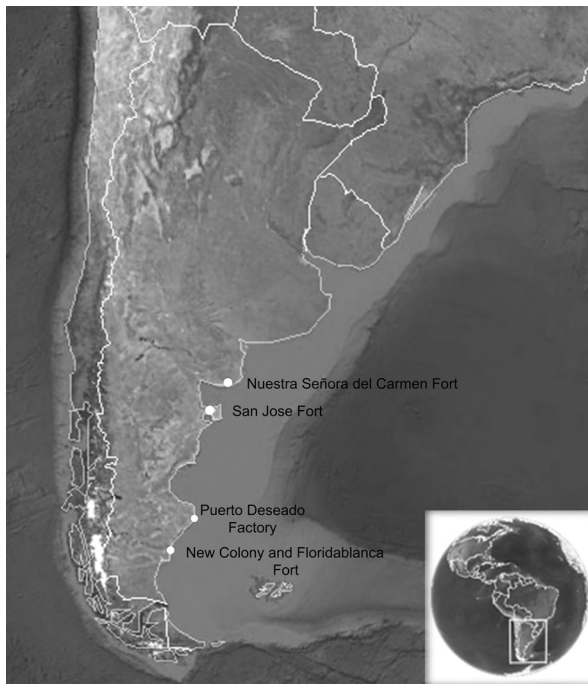
In 1778 the *Reales Cédulas* created a system of colonies and forts along the Patagonian Atlantic coast in modern Argentina. They were conceived to strengthen the Spanish control on overseas possessions inasmuch as to promote their economic development. These settlements also functioned as a social experiment, following the new ideals proposed by the Enlightenment. The core concepts were equality, agriculture as the main basis for development, the patriarchal, nuclear family as a mainstay of social structure, and utility as the glorification of work (Sarrailh 1992; Senatore 2007). Basically, these settlements were posed as a solution for the main problems that arose from Spain's underdeveloped situation, i.e. the privileges of and land ownership by the elites (Amalric and Domergue 2002; Luiz 2006; Sarrailh 1992; Senatore 2005, 2007).

These ideas were the basis for diverse reformation trials and projects in the eighteenth century which included the colonization of peninsular Spain (mainly Andalucía and Sierra Morena), Upper California, and Louisiana (in North America), and some regions in the Caribbean and South America, just to mention a few examples (Dawdy 2008; Luiz 2006; Navarro García 1994; Ortega Soto 1999; Senatore 2007). Such projects implied the relocation of populations or the transfer of Spanish farmers and artisans' families to the colonies, particularly to the peripheral regions of the empire (Apolant 1970; Poska 2016; Senatore 2007).

In the case of Patagonia, the colonial project included the creation of two main and two subsidiary settlements (Fig. 1). The main ones were Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen (Carmen de Patagones, Buenos Aires province), and Nueva Colonia y Fuerte de Floridablanca (San Julián bay, Santa Cruz province).

The former was founded in April 1779, and functioned as a prosperous agricultural and cattle breeding colony until well into the nineteenth century, becoming the main interethnic trade and exchange center to the south of the viceroyalty capital. As later





**Fig. 1** Location of the Spanish settlements in Patagonia (map by author, 2016)

urban developments at this site covered any archaeological evidence of its first occupation, the characteristics of the fort and the interethnic relationships associated have been mainly studied by historians and ethnohistorians (e.g., Gorla 1983; Irurtia 2002; Luiz 2006; Nacuzzi 2005).

Floridablanca was the southernmost colony, created in November 1780. It was basically agricultural in nature, inhabited by Crown officers, chaplains, surgeons, maintenance staff, convicts, seamen staying on the coast, and farmer families who moved directly from Spain. It was regarded as the paradigmatic example of the experimental social project (Senatore 2007). Although it remained inhabited for just three years—until January 1784—this colony was the only post to fulfill the requirements of the Royal Order which forced the abandonment and destruction of the three settlements in the area due to the high costs they represented for the Royal Treasury. The colony of Floridablanca has been thoroughly studied by historical archaeology, emphasizing the social character of the settlement plan, particularly the daily life in the colony and interethnic relations. At the level of everyday practices, it was possible to identify some reformulations of the social order model according to the Enlightenment ideals promoted by the colonizing project (e.g., Bianchi Vilelli 2007, 2009, 2011a; Buscaglia 2008, 2011a, b, 2012; Buscaglia et al. 2016; Bosoni 2010; Marschoff 2007, 2008, 2014; Nuviala Antelo 2008; Senatore 2005, 2007, 2015; Senatore et al. 2007).

The two subsidiary settlements were the Fuerte San José fort (Valdés peninsula, Chubut province) and a fishing processing post in Puerto Deseado (Santa Cruz province). The former was created in January 1779 on the southeastern coast of San José gulf, and defined as a military and productive settlement subsidiary to the Fuerte

Nuestra Señora del Carmen fort. In contrast to this post and Floridablanca settlement, the population at Fuerte San José was basically administrative, military, and male. In addition to the troops, there were Crown officers, chaplains, surgeons, maintenance staff, and convicts. The population varied in number over time, from a few to about 100 people, and was ruled by the substitution of all inhabitants, usually once a year. It later incorporated productive activities when Puesto de la Fuente was created some 30 km away, near a salt lake and permanent freshwater bodies, which was devoted to a salt extraction and cattle breeding station. In 1810 both settlements were destroyed due to an indigenous attack at the onset of the Independence Wars. The incorporation of this case study has revealed the variability present in the application of the Spanish colonizing plan, in order to discuss its peculiarities and generate new data for its definition, functioning, and interethnic dynamics, a number of issues which have not been considered so far from an historical and archaeological perspective (Alberti and Buscaglia 2015; Bianchi Vilelli 2011b; Bianchi Vilelli and Buscaglia 2015; Bianchi Vilelli et al. 2013; Buscaglia 2015a, 2015b; Buscaglia et al. 2012, 2016; Buscaglia and Bianchi Vilelli 2016).

Puerto Deseado was mainly a fishing post created by the *Real Compañía Marítima* in February 1790. It was commissioned to prevent the growing presence of British ships in Patagonian waters as well as to participate in whale, sea-wolf, and sea-lion hunting activities. In 1803 the company closed down because of low productivity and its facilities were destroyed three years later by the British during the failed invasion of the Río de la Plata viceroyalty. It is the less known of the four settlements from both historical and archaeological perspectives (Deodat 1955; Martínez Shaw 2008; Shávelzon 2008).

### *The Politics of Cultural Contact in Patagonia*

A specific policy was designed for the treatment of and interaction with indigenous populations in the Pampa and Patagonia regions. Unlike other colonial strategies, negotiation and peaceful relationships were much privileged (Briones and Carrasco 2000; Luiz 2006; Quijada 2002).

According to Weber (1998), the pressing international conflict forced the Spanish king Charles III and his ministers to promote peripheral developments and the control of native populations beyond the most profitable centres of the empire. Following the failure of religious missions and military intervention, both enlightened philosophy and French and British colonialism suggested that indirect control of natives by means of trade networks was an alternative and less expensive strategy than physical or spiritual conquest. The foundation for this policy was the “*Nuevo sistema de gobierno para la América*,” published by Del Campillo y Cossío (1779). It intended to create a population loyal to the king inasmuch as to ensure their dependence on him, key elements for the expansion of colonial markets and the development of capitalism. Examples of this strategy were the treaties signed with several indigenous groups in southeastern North America in 1790, acknowledging their autonomy and freedom.

In the southern end of South America, similar treaties were acknowledged between the viceroyalty representatives and the most relevant *caciques* of the different indigenous communities in Pampa and Patagonia, particularly in the northern and Andean area of the latter region. The colonial power opted for a strategy of indirect dominance

and respect for the autonomy and diversity of indigenous societies (Briones and Carrasco 2000). This strategy also sought to avoid the indigenous people becoming allies of foreign powers. Indeed, one of the main worries of Spain during this period was the possibility of British and Portuguese expansion over its possessions in the Southern Atlantic.

In the case of Patagonian colonies—especially the southern ones—the system of alms-giving implemented by the colonial government was widely used. The goods sent to the indigenous groups were intended to secure their loyalty and peaceful behaviour while reinforcing interdependence and complementary relations (Luiz 2006; Quijada 2002). Nevertheless, the alms and rations provided by the Spanish and Spanish creole society to the indigenous populations “became an important gear in the native sociopolitical system, not only because they provided products considered increasingly necessary—both in material and symbolic terms (i.e., prestige goods)—but also because they represented a significant part of the reciprocity networks which regulated both intra and intertribal indigenous sociability and authority” (Quijada 2002:118–119).

In the specific case of the Patagonian colonies, this peaceful policy also permitted the survival of the settlement project due to its serious instability and the shortage of goods prevailing in the Spanish colonial expansion in early times. Thus, exchange and trade between settlers and indigenous populations were desirable practices. This strategy sought to discourage any possible hostility manifestation against the vulnerable colonial outpost and lower the costs of the colonising enterprise (e.g., Buscaglia 2012, 2015a; Gorla 1983; Luiz 2006; Nacuzzi 2005; Weber 1998).

### **Native Inhabitants from Eastern Patagonia and Colonial Relationships**

To understand how interethnic relationships were established in Patagonia at the end of the eighteenth century, it is fundamental to briefly introduce the indigenous populations who inhabited the region.

Nomadic and semi-nomadic bands of hunter-gatherers generically known as Tehuelches used to live in eastern Patagonia between the Río Negro River and the Magallanes Straits at the end of the eighteenth century. Their lifeway was based on seasonal movements which consolidated intra- and interethnic social networks. They also secured the direct access and exchange of resources, either with other indigenous groups—Pampas, Puelches, Araucanos, among others— or, from the sixteenth century onward, with explorers, seamen, and colonists who began to circulate or settle in the area (Fig. 2).

These indigenous groups used to cyclically return to certain locations, where they stayed for weeks or even months. The introduction of horses in Patagonian indigenous life in the seventeenth century implied a fast and drastic change in the social systems during historical times (Martinic 1995). Social organization rested in the band and was cemented in kinship relations, under the guidance of a chief or *cacique* with limited power who dominated a defined region of the Patagonian territory. Similar to many other indigenous societies, the Tehuelches distinguished a clear difference between male and female roles, and most of the activities rested on women. They were in charge, among other tasks, of tanning, preparing and ornamenting skins and leathers for their individual and group use, and for exchange (Caviglia 2002; Lista 1998; Martinic 1995).





**Fig. 2** **a** Engraving illustrating the astonishment of European travellers and explorers when meeting Patagonian natives (Byron 1787, reproduced in Del Carril 1992: 49); **b** Tehuelche tent (photograph by Peter Adams 1874, in Mondelo 2012: 74); and **(c)** Tehuelche camp in Puerto Peckett, Magallanes straits (illustration by E. Goupil, circa 1838, in Martinic 1995), cover illustration

When the Spaniards colonized the Patagonian coast at the end of the eighteenth century, the Tehuelches and their ancestors had already had entanglements (*sensu* Thomas 1991; Jordan 2014) with Europeans for more than three centuries, from the arrival of Hernando de Magallanes' fleet to San Julián bay (Santa Cruz province) in 1520. However, these contacts were sporadic, as the stable presence of Europeans in continental Patagonia would not be effective until the end of the eighteenth century, except for a failed colonizing attempt during the sixteenth century (Senatore et al. 2009). The stable Spanish presence and the peculiarities of the Bourbon policy regarding the treatment of indigenous populations generalized possibilities for exchange, trade—especially cattle and horses—and negotiations, which would be capitalized by southern indigenous populations. It is important to mention that in most of the cases recorded so far, the Tehuelches incorporated the Europeans in pre-existent traditional logics and inclusive practices, where peaceful relations were dominant, particularly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see Gavirati 2007; Lista 1998; Martinic 2013). This is the background which contextualised the indigenous' interpretations of the foreigners and their material culture (Thomas 1991). From this perspective, Europeans—as well as their materiality—were accepted, incorporated, resignified and/or rejected as merely any “other”

in the ambivalent cross-cultural relationships and negotiations of Patagonian indigenous peoples throughout their historical trajectories.

One of the indigenous parties who inhabited the southern border of eastern Patagonia would play a key role in structuring the interethnic relationships with the southernmost settlements of the Spanish empire in South America. Leading this party was *cacique* Camelo or Julián Gordo, acknowledged by the Viedma brothers—both superintendents of Patagonia colonies— as the *cacique* with the larger “*séquito*” (entourage) among the Southern Tehuelches (Viedma 1779, 1972b [1783]).

Together with his allies, Julián Camelo would be one of the main leaders to coordinate trade as well as personal and political relationships with three out of the four settlements included in the colonizing project of the Patagonian coast between 1779 and 1788. He was eventually killed in 1788 by the Spaniards near Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen (Buscaglia 2015a).

Previous research has already stated the importance of materiality, as much as redistribution and exchange mechanisms among the Tehuelches. The indigenous groups who did not own horses or certain goods were deprecatd by the richest and more powerful ones (Luiz 2006; Martinic 1995; Viedma 1972a, b [1783]). I believe these prestige logics were also applied to the colonial settlements along the Patagonian coast, as I discuss in this paper. The power and prestige enjoyed by their majors as well as their relative importance and material richness would have been evaluated and valued by Native peoples according to their own cultural frameworks. They were also crucial to setting alliances and gaining benefits from the settlers, placing the Tehuelches in an outstanding position in the power relations with other indigenous groups and the colonial system as a whole. From this perspective, material culture should not be understood only in terms of the functional role it played inside each group and in the individuals' practices, but also concerning its participation in the establishment of social relations. This is particularly true in situations of cultural contact: where a common language is lacking, the material world plays a fundamental role as a means of communication and social interaction (Rothschild 2003).

Finally, unlike other cases in Argentina and America in general, indigenous populations from eastern and continental Patagonia remained autonomous until well into the nineteenth century, when other forms of colonialism and state control strategies—religious missions, territorial dislocation, dispossession, disease and genocide— were imposed on native peoples (e.g., Delrio 2005; Mases 2010). Except for one case during the period considered, no forced and/or systematic interventions occurred in the study area by the colonial power in its campaign to incorporate, exploit, enslave, evangelize, or exterminate the Native populations inhabiting Atlantic Patagonia.

### **Indigenous Agency and Interethnic Relations in the Far End of South America**

The divergent trajectories followed by intercultural relations among the Tehuelches, Floridablanca colony, and Fuerte San José suggest the influence of native agents over the colonial order. The dimension of agency is thus understood as the actors' capacity to gain some kind of control over social relations and the possibility of transforming or maintaining them (Sewell 1992). In this sense I agree with Beck et al. (2011) in thinking that Native agents took advantage of the opportunities offered by the colonial system and considered it a structural resource appropriate to achieve the many

objectives defined by their own sociocultural organization. From this perspective and in this particular scenario, the colonial period can be considered a context for Native action rather than a mere restrictive framework set by European domination (Panich 2013: 108–109).

Although domination and resistance relationships comprised a definite and undeniable aspect of most of the colonial process, they have frequently been associated with binary perspectives embedded in an essentialism that masked the multidimensionality of power relationships in some colonial contexts (Ortner 1995). Furthermore, the analysis of resistance can be limited to what is rejected by the dominant systems and the manifestations of this rejection. Even though in these dichotomy models the “subaltern groups” are assigned an active role, they do not always consider the transformations or limits such groups may introduce in the structures preconceived as dominant (Buscaglia 2011c, 2013).

In the discussion I present here the scenarios, the social practices of the different agents involved—both indigenous and European— and the material conditions gain particular relevance. According to van Dommelen and Rowlands (2012: 22) “a double rationale thus exists for the study of material culture in colonial situations: first of all, because colonial encounters consist of material and ‘tactile’ relationships between people and their material worlds, and secondly, because of the impact of the material surroundings on people’s daily life in terms of both actions and perceptions.” I aim to highlight these aspects to understand the variable ways in which interethnic relationships and Native logics regarding the materiality of colonialism were structured, as well as the diverse controls indigenous groups imposed over the colonial settlements analyzed here.

### **Interethnic Relationships in the Context of the Nueva Colonia y Fuerte de Floridablanca (1780–1784)**

Elsewhere, I have considered the role of indigenous agency in generating alternatives to the model of social order intended for Floridablanca. I have tried to relate the representation of the contact in the narratives generated by the colonial administration, the ideal of society and the material dimension of daily practices, considering the internal heterogeneity of both indigenous and European actors (Buscaglia 2011a, b; 2012; Buscaglia and Antelo 2007). Framed by this background, I present the analysis of interethnic relationships in Floridablanca to state its contrast and variability with Fuerte San José. I focus on the information from written sources and the material culture recovered in diverse contexts of the colony.

It should be noted that the official correspondence, diaries, and ethnographic descriptions produced by the superintendent of the colony, Don Antonio Viedma, represent my main source of information to account for the interethnic relationships in Floridablanca. This usage is due to the limited number of historical descriptions mentioning interethnic relationships for this specific study case, but also to the fact that the few references found reinforce his views on the issue. However, it is important to indicate that in previous works I have questioned the biases and peculiarities inherent in the superintendent’s discourse (Buscaglia 2011a, 2012).

The colony of Floridablanca represents a case study where the encounters and relationships with indigenous groups were immediate, peaceful, and frequent until the

colony was abandoned in January 1784. Previous to the creation of the colony of Floridablanca, the correspondence from Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen indicates that in February 1779 the *cacique* Julián Camelo visited the fort to define the political and commercial relations with the newcomers (Viedma 1779; Villarino 1779). However, this settlement was more than 1000 km from his territorial influence area. When the colonizing expedition arrived at the coasts of Puerto San Julián in March 1780, the Tehuelches suggested the colonists settle near a freshwater source, close to the place where their camp was established (Viedma 1972a [1783]). It is not a minor detail, and could probably be related to the *cacique* Julián Camelo's intention of starting direct relations with the colony, given the benefits he could obtain from their vicinity.

Unlike other cases –even in the same settlement project – the presence of colonial materiality in the indigenous territory was not rejected; quite the contrary, it was incorporated and capitalized by Native actors in their own logics and for their benefit. Both written sources and archaeological evidence justify the effective presence of indigenous groups not only nearby but also inside the settlement.

According to the revision of different historical sources –diaries, correspondence, accounting records– the coexistence between Tehuelches and settlers was particularly harmonious and long-lasting, at least between 1781 and 1782, and particularly in winter time (Table 1).

In this context, it is important to mention that *cacique* Julián's tribe significantly outnumbered the initial colonizing group at Floridablanca, which was limited to some 150 people, whereas the indigenous group gathered between 300 and 400 individuals at the time of group aggregation (Vargas y Ponce 1788; Viedma 1972a [1783]). Furthermore, this number would exponentially increase when they received visits from akin indigenous groups (Viedma 1972b [1783]). Superintendent Don Antonio Viedma's worries concerning the increase in the number of indigenous people and his own limited military force, was expressed in the following letter addressed to Viceroy Vértiz:

*My dearest and most venerated Sir: the infantry detachment in this new settlement, originally composed by 40 men and two officials, has been reduced to 20 men and two officials due to the illnesses we suffered last winter [...], for this reason His Excellency will deign to relieve this detachment sending (at least) the same number of troop it originally included. I would ask for a larger number of*

**Table 1** Supply and times of coexistence between Tehuelches and Floridablanca colony between 1780 and 1783

Chronology	Location of indigenous camps	Approximate permanence times	Warehouse deliveries to the indigenous
1780	Next to the temporary settlement	Two months (between December 1780 and January 1781)	No information
1781	Next to the fort	Seven months (January and between May and October)	All year, except February
1782	Next to the fort	Seven months (between May and December, except November)	All year, except May
1783	No information	No information	No information

*troop if it were not for the current war and circumstance in the Peru provinces His Excellency relates, due to the large group of Indians who has settled here and is continually increasing with new tolderías, which would be joined by many more this summer, according to the Indians (Viedma 1781b, translation by author).*

The presence of the colony must have triggered some changes in the mobility system of this Tehuelche party; while the colony was functioning, the habitual indigenous movements toward the north to interact with other indigenous groups as well as with the Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen and Fuerte San José became less frequent, as confirmed by the correspondence analyzed for these cases (Buscaglia 2012, 2015a; Luiz 2006).

Whenever possible, the colony offered the Tehuelche group a regular monthly provision of goods and supplies, with records of occasional special deliveries as a reward for favors or the purchase of horses, for instance:

*we send 8 iron cooking pots, 100 ponchos, 100 bunches of assorted glass beads and 24 iron horse brakes to be traded by mares and other urgencies of the fort, warning His Grace that in this case that I believe the cost you inform is highly excessive, since in this province the most expensive mares can be bought by 3 or 4 reales and there, estimating by the goods the Indians ask for, they are no less than 12 or 14 pesos (Fernández 1782, translation by author).*

In certain cases, Tehuelche's preferences—particularly their leaders'—for specific kinds of goods and/or supplies were considered: blue or “milky coloured” beads, iron cooking pots, textiles, tobacco and different clothing items—preferably blue—accessories for horses, and schnapps, wine, yerba mate, and bread, among others (Viedma 1782b). Therefore, this information transcends the picture of indigenous people as mere passive recipients and highlights their control on the negotiations. In this sense, they were able to set limits and impose values to the flow of material culture by means of exchange and trade relations, mostly associated with the accumulation of prestige goods. According to Luiz (2006) these preferences concerned objects of an increasing symbolic value, highly estimated by its rarity. They were in turn related to the intensification of social differentiation processes experienced by indigenous populations at the end of the eighteenth century, due to colonialism and the restructuration of interethnic and power relationships. Placing our focus on the elections made by indigenous people, as Silliman (2005: 281) notes, questions the perspectives which only privilege European motivations, objectives, and wishes in colonial relationships.

Although the Spanish Bourbon policies for the encounter tried to establish peaceful relationships with the indigenous groups—which in many cases implied satisfying their demand—in practice, colonial settlements had few alternatives due to the extremely vulnerable situations they suffered: isolation, diseases such as scurvy, food shortage, internal conflicts, low population, and deficiencies in the defensive system, among others (Buscaglia 2012, 2015a; Luiz 2006; Senatore 2007). For instance, one of the main problems faced by the colony was the frequent food shortage (Viedma 1972a [1783],b [1783]; also see Marschoff 2007). Although the colony had a declared productive objective and was intended to depend on its own agricultural return and –



to a lesser extent—cattle herding, its production was not abundant enough to feed the whole population. The outcome was particularly limited by the short life of the settlement and the conditions needed for the adaptation of cultigens and animals to the Patagonian landscape (Bosoni 2010; Marschoff 2007, 2008).

In this context, indigenous populations played a fundamental role in compensating food shortage by facilitating information about local resources and, above all, by regularly providing guanaco meat (*Lama guanicoe*), even without being rewarded when critical events affected the colony (Viedma 1972b [1783]: 906, 908, 934). These practices are supported by archaeofaunal evidence, as in most of the contexts studied—particularly the fort—there was a dominance of local species, mainly guanaco, which were processed in the European fashion, as seen in the skeletal parts represented and the kind and topographic location of the cultural marks (Marschoff 2007, 2008). Although part of the presence of this prey inside the settlement may also relate to the dwellers' hunting expeditions, the limitations of eighteenth-century firearms made the indigenous *boleadoras* a much more efficient hunting weapon (Martinic 1995).

The cooperation offered by the Tehuelches was not limited to the provision of food. They occasionally assisted the colony in many other ways, such as fattening mules, capturing wild cattle, landscape exploration (Viedma 1972a [1783]: 908, 910, 922–933), and searching for deserters (Viedma 1782a). Doing favors may not have been a truly altruist behavior by the indigenous groups since helping colonists was capitalized in the reception of material benefits and the establishment of relief agreements in case of conflicts or other needs (Iruetia 2002).

Nevertheless, the relationship between the Tehuelches and the colony went beyond economic and political aspects. The superintendent's diary and letters, as well as the material culture recovered, suggest closer relationships between both populations. One of the more paradigmatic examples was the case of the dweller called María de Mata who, suffering from a serious illness, gave her young daughter to *cacique* Julián Camelo's sister to be breastfed (Viedma 1972a [1783]: 915–916). In other cases, the *cacique* left his people under the superintendent's care when he had to go hunting with his men for many days (Viedma 1972a [1783]: 907). Or, as the superintendent indicated in May 1781, a few months after the colony settled: “The Indians have remained in good terms, *cacique* Julián Gordo likes me very much; when he has his camp nearby, he does not leave my rooms” (Viedma 1781a; translation by author). Viedma himself, when finishing his relation of the Tehuelches from San Julián, states: “These Indians are usually extremely nice and innocent, and they are so affectionate and treat me so modestly, mainly the *cacique* Julián, that if we had enough horses I believe there would not be an inch of those lands we could not inspect in their company” (Viedma 1972b ([1783]: 963; translation by author).

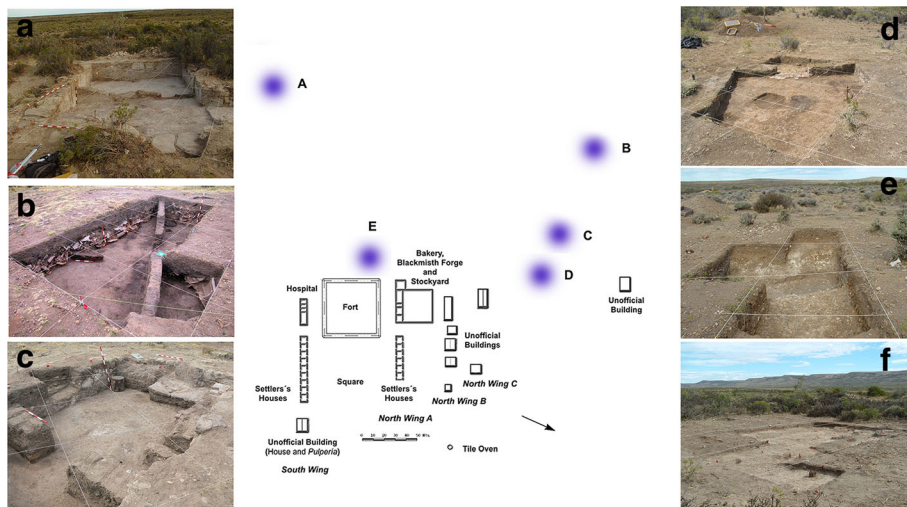
Written sources are, however, particularly silent regarding sexual intercourse, intermarriage, and *mestizaje* between these two groups, despite the fact that the inhabitants of the colony and the satellite coastal settlement were mostly single men—e.g., soldiers, convicts, sailors. In Patagonian forts and colonies there were expressed prohibitions of “illicit relations” between male colonists and indigenous women, penalized with several kinds of punishments (Gorla 1983). Furthermore, Tehuelche polygamy, acceptance of adultery, and sexual tolerance must have been in clear contradiction with

Christian morality and the utility principle colonial projects were expected to follow. Thus, it is expected that, if they actually existed, they had to be silenced in the official discourse (Buscaglia 2008, 2011a, b; 2012).

### *Interethnic Relationships in La Nueva Colonia and Fuerte de Floridablanca from an Archaeological Perspective*

The physical manifestation of the colony in the southern part of Patagonia must necessarily have introduced a drastic—though limited in space—transformation of the ancestral landscape inhabited by indigenous populations. The Spaniards built a settlement of some architectural magnitude, with several buildings of adobe, stone, tiles, and wood. Furthermore, the land was divided into vegetable gardens, cattle pens, and cultivation fields near the water source. The colony, with a typical Spanish planning, was organized around a central square where the fort shared the space with several houses for farmers' families, a hospital, a bakery, an ironsmith, a kiln for tiles and bricks, general stores (*pulperías*), collective kitchens, and some houses of private individuals (Fig. 3). When the colony was abandoned, its buildings were set afire to prevent the enemies of the Crown occupy them (Bianchi Vilelli 2009, 2011a; Buscaglia 2012; Marschoff 2014; Senatore 2007; Senatore et al. 2007). In the coastal area, on the contrary, a small camp was established to protect the supplies shipped to the area and guard the entrance to the bay (Buscaglia 2008, 2012).

Although it is not possible to include the discussion and thorough description of the material culture recovered at Floridablanca (see for example Bianchi Vilelli 2009; Buscaglia 2012; Marschoff 2014), some details about the archaeological findings associated with indigenous peoples, nonetheless, are useful. Similarly, the goods they



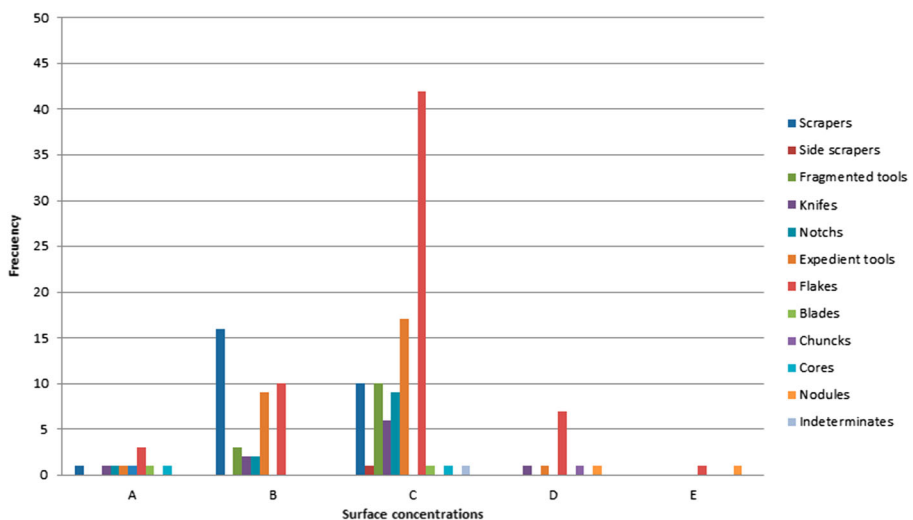
**Fig. 3** Middle: Archaeological plan of Nueva Colonia and Fuerte de Floridablanca and surface concentrations associated to indigenous camps (circles A, B, C, D and E). Left: **a** Household and *pulperia* own by the carpenter, former prisoner, not included in the Crown's original building project, **b** Farmer's family household; and **c** Kitchen annexed to the house. Right: **d** Household of a soldier and his wife, not included in the Crown's original building project, **e**) moat of the fort (eastern side); and **f** Superintendent's room inside the fort (western side). (Map and photos by Proyecto Floridablanca, 1998–2007)

**Table 2** Abundance and diversity of the major categories of material culture recovered in the five surface concentrations at Floridablanca colony

Material Type	Artifactual Surface Concentrations									
	A		B		C		D		E	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Glass	3	15.8	3	1.6	18	15.0	2	13.3	21	25.0
Ceramic	7	36.8	145	76.3	4	3.3	2	13.3	61	72.6
Lithic	9	47.4	42	22.1	98	81.7	11	73.4	2	2.4
Total	19	100	190	100	120	100	15	100	84	100

received as gifts or exchanged permits the comparison with the material culture recovered at Fuerte San José. The presence and contact with Native populations are closely reflected in the materials recovered nearby Floridablanca and inside its excavated structures. These findings incorporated a wider range of actors and interactions than the ones interacting at the discursive level (for more details see Buscaglia 2011a, 2012).

Systematic archaeological surveys defined five surface concentrations near the Floridablanca fort and settlement (see Fig. 3). They evidenced a high diversity of lithic artifacts and instruments of clear indigenous manufacture associated with European artifacts dated to the eighteenth century (Table 2). It is important to note that the archaeological remains recorded at surface concentrations are similar to the objects recovered in stratigraphic contexts (for more details on the comparability of contexts see Buscaglia and Nuviala Antelo 2007; Buscaglia 2012). Surface concentrations were interpreted as indigenous residential camps. In order of importance the lithic artifacts



**Fig. 4** Frequency distribution of lithic artifacts recovered at surface concentrations at Floridablanca colony



**Fig. 5** Artifacts recovered at surface concentrations: (a) scrapers of different varieties of silica, (b) fragments of majolica, (c) botijas –olive jars– sherds and, (d) turquoise and striped glass beads (photograph by S. Buscaglia)

recovered include different kinds of flakes, scrapers, expedient tools, notches, knives, blades, nodules, side scrapers, chunks, cores, and unidentified artifacts (Figs. 4 and 5).

European artifacts are represented by glass remains– mainly square gin bottles ( $n = 20$ ), blue beads ( $n = 14$ ), drinking glass ( $n = 2$ ), scraper ( $n = 1$ ), and unidentified remains ( $n = 10$ )– and Spanish ceramics sherds – olive jars ( $n = 199$ ), majolica tableware ( $n = 16$ ) and others ( $n = 4$ ) (Fig. 5). On the other hand, there is no record

**Table 3** Abundance and diversity of the major categories of material culture recovered in the pulperia and settler’s houses of the Floridablanca colony

Material Type	Pulperia		Settler’s Houses					
	South Wing I		South Wing II.6		North Wing B II		North Wing B III	
	(24 m <sup>2</sup> )		(45 m <sup>2</sup> )		(36 m <sup>2</sup> )		(8 m <sup>2</sup> )	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Bone	525	51.0	7817	89.5	313	65.6	5	100
Metal	455	44.1	798	9.1	85	17.8	0	0
Glass	48	4.6	23	0.3	56	11.7	0	0
Ceramic	3	0.3	93	1.0	15	3.2	0	0
Lithic	0	0	4	0.1	8	1.7	0	0
Total	1031	100	8735	100	477	100	5	100

**Table 4** Abundance and diversity of the major categories of material culture recovered in the Floridablanca Fort sectors

Material type	Fort sectors									
	East		Northeast				West			
	Moat		Esplanade		Official barracks/ East bastion		Barracks settlers/ warehouses		Superintendent's Room	
	(8 m <sup>2</sup> )		(9.55 m <sup>2</sup> )		(10 m <sup>2</sup> )		(22 m <sup>2</sup> )		(26 m <sup>2</sup> )	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Bone	4110	75.7	114	68.7	541	71.9	1028	57.0	1035	59.4
Metal	553	10.2	30	18.1	78	10.4	534	29.6	549	31.5
Glass	423	7.8	16	9.6	101	13.4	174	9.6	99	5.7
Ceramic	264	4.9	6	3.6	26	3.5	56	3.1	46	2.6
Lithic	77	1.4	0	0	6	0.8	12	0.7	14	0.8
Total	5427	100	166	100	752	100	1804	100	1743	100

of indigenous pottery so far in any of the archaeological contexts analyzed (a discussion of this problem, however, exceeds the aims of this paper).

Inside the settlement, the material evidence of the interactions between indigenous groups and colonists was identified both inside the houses and in the different areas excavated at the fort. Tables 3 and 4 represent the complete list of the material culture recovered in the house-*pulperia* (South Wing I) and other domestic units (South Wing II.6 and North Wing B II), as well as in the different excavated sectors integrating the fort, such as the moat, the troop's barracks, the terrace, the farmers' rooms reused as storage spaces, and the Superintendent's room.

In the corner of one of the enclosures defining the house-*pulperia* (see Fig. 3a) –built by a convict carpenter– a concentration of 19 white, blue, and light blue glass beads of the seed bead type were found embedded in the earthen ground of the structure, among other archaeological materials (Fig. 6a). They were mainly associated with fragments of liquor bottles and pieces of *Zaedyus pichiy* carapace with articulated osteoderms (Bianchi Villelli 2009). The absence of any rodent bones suggests it could have been used as a kind of container or plate, a rather frequent representative of Tehuelche materiality (Martinic 1995; Viedma 1972a [1783] b).

From the three domestic units excavated, just two evidenced the circulation of indigenous technological practices and/or contact with native populations: South Wing II.6 and North Wing B II. The former is one of the dwellings defining the front of the square built by the Crown to house the farmers. The fire and collapse of the tile roof sealed the lower deposits preserving the evidence (see Fig. 3b, c). Unlike the rest of the contexts analyzed in the settlement, it was a space originally designed to house farmers' families directly arrived in Patagonia from Spain. Hence, these men, women, and perhaps children were absolutely unacquainted with indigenous peoples and it may have conditioned their interaction. The diverse archaeological materials include four lithic instruments and artifacts: a scraper, a notch, and two flakes. Only one flake was recovered from the occupation floor at the domestic unit, although, similarly to the





**Fig. 6** Artifacts recovered in the structures of Floridablanca colony: (a) white and colorless glass beads—unofficial building, household—*pulperia*, (b) scraper knapped on glass beaker base—settler’s house, (c) lithic grinding tool—*mano*—reused as anvil—unofficial building, household of a soldier’s family, (d) lithic tools, (e) turquoise and striped glass beads and (f) metal indigenous bead—fort—(photographs by S. Buscaglia, except “f” taken from Nuviala Antelo 2008: 81)

remaining lithic materials— which migrated from the upper levels— it may have had an intrusive origin due to its reduced size. The glass objects were composed of four glass beads, a blue bugle bead, and three round white beads recovered on the occupation floor. Although they may have been part of the personal adornment of Spanish women, both their form and white color also correspond to the ornaments given to indigenous peoples, the so called “milky coloured” beads (Viedma 1782b). Two scrapers knapped on the base of a translucent drinking glass were recovered as well, one of them on the house floor and the second in an upper level. The former is a thick scraper, with damage on the frontal edge that may indicate its use on hard surfaces (Fig. 6b). The latter is an average scraper with a rather blunt edge due to use. Regardless of the way they were incorporated in to the house or the agent who elaborated/used the scrapers, their presence would indicate the circulation of local technological patterns among the colonists.

North Wing B II (Fig. 3d) is a residence annexed to the official project and inhabited by a soldier and his wife (Bianchi Villelli 2009). The artifact assemblage from the several stratigraphic levels yielded eight lithic artifacts including a side scraper, a knife, a bifacial tool, a stone bead, a flake, a grinding pestle, a

hammer stone, and a scraper. The latter three in particular were associated with the house floor, under the collapsed burned rush roof. The pestle, reused as an anvil, and the hammer stone have no parallels in the site and indicate the performance of specific activities related to grinding and manufacture (Fig. 6c). Their presence inside the house may indicate a common ground where both indigenous and Spanish creoles' technological knowledge, practices, and objects met.

The lithic artifacts recovered at the fort present a higher diversity and abundance than the rest of the contexts at the settlement. Most were found in the moat enclosing the fort (see Fig. 3e), used as a discard area from the beginning of the colony ( $n = 77$ ). It is followed by the residential spaces in the Northeast Sector ( $n = 18$ ) and, lastly, the superintendent's room (see Fig. 3f) in the West Sector ( $n = 14$ ). The abundant and diverse lithic assemblages recovered include the kind of standardized scrapers frequently used by indigenous women to tan leather. There were also flakes—mainly of the angular and sharpening kinds—knapping debris, knives, a few cores, and French and Spanish gunflints, among other artifacts (Figs. 6d and 7).

These assemblages would indicate not only the circulation of indigenous technology inside the settlement—particularly in the fort—but also the performance of indigenous daily activities there, which implied the manufacture, use, and maintenance of tools, probably related to processing leather and other raw materials (Buscaglia 2012). There is currently no evidence either in documentary sources or in the material culture referring to the exploitation of the indigenous workforce. For instance, having in mind the long stay of *cacique* Julián Camelo's tribe in the area, the whole lot of scrapers recovered at the site ( $n = 45$ ) during the complete occupation would be too scarce to think about the use of Native work in activities such as the manufacture of leather blankets or *quillangos* to be traded in large-scale colonial circuits.

Concerning the glass artifacts, only a fragmented scraper was recovered in the moat, manufactured from a flat piece of glass. The fort reported more diversified types of

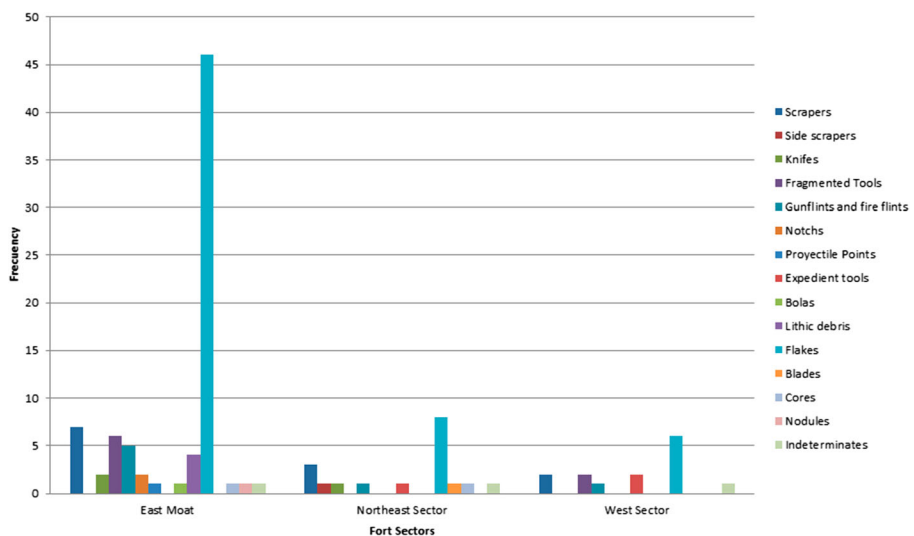


Fig. 7 Frequency distribution of lithic artifacts recovered in the fort of Floridablanca colony

beads ( $n = 17$ ) than other contexts inside the colony, yielding European rounded, oval, tubular, bugle and seed glass beads. They also present a variety of colors— white, turquoise, and blue— and motifs—plain and polychromous lines— (Buscaglia 2012; Nuviala Antelo 2008) (Fig. 6e). The beads also include a faceted black wooden bead, probably part of a rosary, and a metal bead of possible indigenous manufacture (Fig. 6f) and acquired by trade with an other ethnic groups —possibly of Araucano origin (Nuviala Antelo 2008).

European artifacts typically related to the interaction with Natives, such as sleigh bells and thimbles were also recovered inside the fort (Buscaglia 2012; Nuviala Antelo 2008). Furthermore, some clothing accessories —buttons and buckles—, personal ornaments —rings and earrings— different metal objects, and some pottery fragments must have participated in interethnic dynamics. The appropriation of these artifacts —which was frequent among Patagonian indigenous people— may respond to their fascination for objects that were strange or foreign and that called their attention strongly enough to turn them into valuable, even magical possessions (Martinic 1995). In this sense, pilot Jorge Barne's opinion during his stay in San Julián in 1752 is rather illustrative: “they are extremely fond of adornments and beads, and all kinds of trinkets and pieces of clothing and linen, *even if they are rags*, and also sleigh bells and bedpans” (Barne 1969 [ca. 1752]: 90, translation by author; emphasis added). A large part of the artifacts recorded corresponds to personal ornaments, so their role in status and gender demarcation should not be neglected, both in the specific scenario of Floridablanca and in the Patagonian landscape.

From all the contexts studied, the fort presented the most definite evidence of interethnic interactions in terms of the presence of unquestionable indigenous lithic technology and items of colonial exchange. The superintendent's residence and the presence of single men inhabiting shared spaces who probably had previous experience with indigenous populations—the troop in particular— would have turned the fort into a more receptive space for interaction between Tehuelche men and women and the settlers (Buscaglia 2012). Therefore, spaces both inside and outside the settlement testify to the intersection of practices, identities, and materialities typical of multiethnic and shared scenarios, where ambiguity and multivocality were the rule rather than the exception (Silliman 2010a).

### *Interethnic Relations as Negotiation and Cooperation*

Summing up, I consider that the creation of Floridablanca, the conclusiveness of its materiality, the superintendent's cleverness inasmuch as the regular policy of feasting and reward to honor its indigenous neighbors placed the settlement in a privileged position in the Tehuelches's view, who found in the colony and its authorities appropriate political and material allies.

In this sense, the presence of the colony implied the direct access in their own territory to certain goods highly rated in the Tehuelche sociocultural systems. Many of these objects were much appreciated to reinforce prestige and power positions both inside and outside the group by means of different mechanisms such as appropriation, resignification, redistribution, and exchange, in the broader frame of social and territorial networks.

Furthermore, the direct and stable presence of the colonists offered the possibility of adopting personal and group strategic alliances with the newcomers. In this sense, the observation made in 1783 by the pilot Basilio Villarino is eloquent: “In this river [Río Negro] the Indians met the Tehuelches from San Julián, with whom they traded intensively as they were rich in the jewellery awarded by the Christians from this settlement” (Villarino 1969 [1782]: 1123, translation by author). As noted, these relationships went beyond the mere economic and political spheres, reaching an intimate nature at least in some segments of both populations.

### **Interethnic Relations in the Context of Fuerte San José and Puesto de La Fuente (1779–1810)**

Fuerte San José represents the antithesis of Floridablanca regarding the structuring of interethnic relationships. Not only are written references about the contacts between both populations significantly less frequent, but the material expression is quite different.

Even though Fuerte San José was founded in 1779, no historical record reported relations between indigenous people and the Spanish and creole population in the peninsula until 1787 when they started in an abrupt and hostile manner. Official exploration reports for the area selected for Fuerte San José and Puesto de la Fuente mention no indigenous presence previous to their foundations. Hence, they do not describe any recent or past material evidence of native populations –i.e., the remains of lithic artifacts, hearths, and bones, etc.– although they were well known (De la Piedra 1778). A similar observation is found in pilot Basilio Villarino’s diary (1779), where he says “We changed places to settle in a more advantageous position close to the port. There was no evidence of either people or Indians nearby” (translation by author). In a 1782 letter to Francisco Viedma, Villarino still expressed: “There you can raise 2,000 or more heads of cattle, you can raise horses and sheep, not fearing being stolen by the Indians” (Villarino 1969 [1782]: 227; translation by author). This situation clearly contrasted with the cases of Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen, Floridablanca, and the fishing factory in Puerto Deseado, where contact with indigenous people was almost immediate both in the exploratory phases of the settlement and during the arrival of population contingents (Elizalde 1938 [1792]; González 1965 [1798]; Luiz 2006; Nacuzzi 2005).

Similarly to Floridablanca, Fuerte San José suffered several setbacks during its 31 years of occupation. Goods shortage, spoiled food, and scurvy marked the daily life of the colonists in the Valdés peninsula. However, the colonial narratives are silent about any assistance provided by local indigenous groups (Bianchi Vilelli et al. 2013; Buscaglia 2015a; Buscaglia and Bianchi Vilelli 2016).

Despite its vulnerability, neither historical nor archaeological research presented evidence of a peaceful treatment of local populations to gain their assistance or minimize conflict with them and thus prevent the failure of the colonizing project. On the other hand, interethnic relationships in the context of the Valdés peninsula were rather peculiar due to their mainly hostile nature from 1787 to 1810, when an indigenous attack ended the colonial settlements in the peninsula.

During these 23 years, interactions with indigenous people were unexpectedly characterized by their occasional and conflictive nature, contradicting both indigenous

and Bourbon policies regarding contact as well as the way interethnic relationships were structured in the rest of the colonial outposts (Buscaglia 2012; Gorla 1983; Luiz 2006; Nacuzzi 2005). In most cases, the scenario par excellence was Puesto de la Fuente, a settlement complementary to Fuerte San José and devoted to productive activities such as cattle herding, salt extraction, and water provision (Buscaglia and Bianchi Vilelli 2016). The Southern Tehuelches, particularly *cacique* Julián Camelo and his relatives, such as *cacique* Patricio and his allies, are mentioned in historical documents as the main protagonists of hostile events, which included interpersonal violence, horse and cattle theft, and the killing of the latter. Oxen slaughter was a significant strategy affecting San José neighbors, as they were the only means available to transport fresh water from Puesto de la Fuente to the coastal fort, and thus guarantee the survival of its inhabitants.

Regarding the indigenous perception of Fuerte San José and its authorities, *cacique* Julián Camelo's opinion is definite when he visited the fort in May 1788:

*On May 27th the Indian cacique Julián arrived at this fort with two chinas [women] and two Indians and indicated that his visit was for pleasure and to know what kind of captain I was -if I was kind-, so as to bring his toldos [camp] later; that they had (according to him) many chinas who do plenty of leatherwork to show me [...]. Later on, and after being offered some bread and wine, which he consumed, he asked to dine. I order to give him meat and beans, but he did not accept them, being rather disgusted for that salty meat we gave him, and adding that I was a bad, poor Captain because I did not give him liquor or yerba mate. (Lucero 1788, translation by author).*

From the *cacique*'s perspective, considering his previous experience in Floridablanca, this first meeting at Fuerte San José was not only negative, but ended in his capture and murder due to the identification of stolen Spanish horses in his drove.

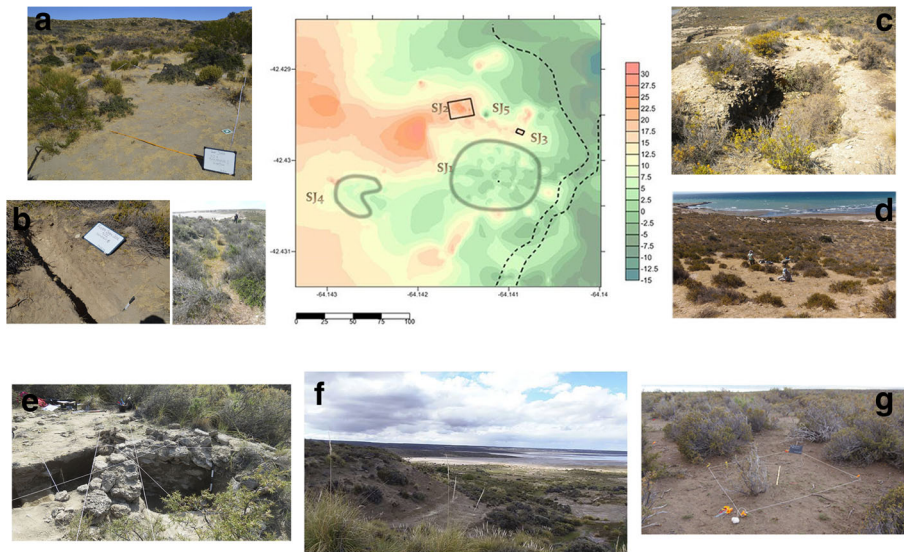
So far, the results would indicate a tendency where the presence of indigenous groups in the Valdés peninsula may correspond to the abandonment of Floridablanca and Puerto Deseado. While such settlements existed, the garrison of Fuerte San José did not report the presence of indigenous populations nearby the fort or Puesto de la Fuente. In the case of Puerto Deseado, written sources refer to the encounter and exchange with Southern Tehuelches in the settlement, among who was *cacique* Patricio –Julián's brother– and other allied *caciques* (Elizalde 1938 [1792]; González 1965 [1798]; Muñoz 1791). On the other hand, the absence of Natives in the Valdés peninsula may also be related to the increased presence of ships to capture sea wolves and whales in the eastern Patagonian coast at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, when the capitalist system and its materiality was consolidating in the area (Caviglia 2015; Silva and Silva 1974). It is possible then that the precarious situation of the settlements in the Valdés peninsula functioned not only as a material indicator of vulnerability but also of poverty regarding the provision of articles of some interest for the natives, except for cattle and horses. It should be remembered that indigenous populations were the main providers of cattle and horses in Pampa and Patagonia settlements, generating feedback responses in the Native raids system (Gorla 1983; Luiz 2006; Nacuzzi 2005; Operé 2001).



The gift of monthly rations to indigenous populations or references to the provision of articles to be offered or exchanged with them are absent in the historical sources revised for the Valdés peninsula. The only exception dates to 1809 when, after the massive theft of cattle in the area, the major at Fuerte Nuestra Señora del Carmen decided to reward those *caciques*—of unclear ethnic affiliation— who participated in the search for the deserters of Fuerte San José accused of the theft. In that occasion, the fort required supplies and goods to compensate the indigenous people camping in the surroundings of Fuerte San José (Apocryphal 1810). Nevertheless, the dwellers never received the provisions, and the incident was probably a main reason for the final outcome of the Spanish settlements in the Valdés peninsula since now the majors were exposed to the consequences of neglecting the strict protocols ruling indigenous reciprocity systems. As Thomas (1991: 15) has suggested, “mistakes in giving have consequences.”

### *Interethnic Relationships at Fuerte San José and Puesto de La Fuente from an Archaeological Perspective*

Despite its 31 years, the problems related to the precarious living conditions and the temporary nature of the domestic spaces was never solved (Bianchi et al. 2013; Buscaglia and Bianchi Vilelli 2016). According to historical documents, the settlement nuclei on the coast would have been composed of wooden posts and leather tents, with some isolated examples of adobe structures with straw roofs, such as the church.



**Fig. 8** Archaeological research at Fuerte San José and Puesto de la Fuente. Center: topographic plan of Fuerte San José with areas and structures location. **a** San José 1 Sector, core population, **(b)** San José 2 Sector, view of the moat that surrounded a small fort. **(c)** Sector San José 3, view of the rectangular trace of the highly eroded adobe wall, with a hole dug into the bedrock—the purpose of which has not yet been ascertained, and **(d)** San José 5 Sector, view of the dump and the accumulation area of archaeological remains on the hillside. Down: **(e)** stone building identified at Puesto de la Fuente, **(f)** view of the rock outcrop over the salt pan, and **(g)** archaeological sampling surface at Concentration 2 (Map by M. Bianchi Vilelli 2014 and photographs by M. Bianchi Vilelli and S. Buscaglia)

**Table 5** Abundance and diversity of the major categories of material culture recovered at Fuerte San José. The square meters excavated and surveyed on the surface—only SJ1 and SJ2— are mentioned

Material Type	Sectors of Fuerte San José							
	San José 1		San José 2		San José 4		San José 5	
	(13.5 m <sup>2</sup> and 275 m <sup>2</sup> )		(3.9 m <sup>2</sup> and 16 m <sup>2</sup> )		(2 m <sup>2</sup> )		(1.25 m <sup>2</sup> )	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Bone	1180	50.8	6	14.0	0	0	2120	96.1
Metal	364	15.7	14	32.6	1	50.0	38	1.7
Glass	169	7.3	1	2.3	0	0	14	0.6
Ceramic	597	25.7	22	51.2	1	50.0	29	1.3
Lithic	12	0.5	0	0	0	0	5	0.2
Total	2322	100	43	100	2	100	2206	100

Archaeological interventions in five of the sectors connected with the settlement – settlement nuclei (San José 1), small fort (San José 2 and 3), cemetery (San José 4), and refusal area (San José 5) – confirmed the precarious situation of the fort. It is also manifested in a low obstrusivity and limited evidence of more durable buildings –i.e., adobe remains, mud walls, tiles, bricks, and stone (Bianchi Vilelli et al. 2013). In Puesto de la Fuente only one stone structure of unclear functionality—Structure 1— remains partially standing, with signs of pillaging, together with two half-buried stone alignments nearby, which have not been studied yet (Fig. 8). In this regard, Henry Libanus Jones –a Welshman who visited San José gulf five times between 1812 and 1820— described in his diary two stone buildings located at the edge of Salina Grande, which he attributed to settlers from Fuerte San José (Dumrauf 1991: 72–80).

Unlike Floridablanca, no artifact assemblages typical of the contact period have yet been recovered in the colonial settlements at Valdés peninsula. No evidence of the use of European raw materials— metal, glass, and ceramics –or artifacts has been

**Table 6** Abundance and diversity of the major categories of material culture recovered at Puesto de la Fuente. The excavated square meters—Structure 1— and surveyed on the surface—Concentrations 1 and 2— are mentioned

Material Type	Sectors of Puesto de la Fuente					
	Structure 1		Concentration 1 (rock outcrop over the salt pan)		Concentration 2	
	(2 m <sup>2</sup> )		(8 m <sup>2</sup> )		(900 m <sup>2</sup> )	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Bone	22	81.5	326	76.0	2	0.4
Metal	1	3.7	25	5.8	1	0.2
Glass	1	3.7	10	2.3	2	0.4
Ceramic	0	0	18	4.2	0	0
Lithic	3	11.1	50	11.7	503	99.0
Total	27	100	429	100	508	100

reported so far, even though they were usually considered exchange items, such as glass beads, thimbles, sleigh bells, and clothing items. A similar situation may be mentioned for the rest of the archaeological expectations for the sites or assemblages of indigenous origin during the postcontact period. Considering that the archaeological contexts recorded in both sites (Tables 5 and 6) have a similar time frame, the assemblages only include modern remains, minor associations between European material culture—i.e., eighteenth–nineteenth century productions— and indigenous artifacts, or are just limited to the latter (Alberti and Buscaglia 2015; Belardi 2005; Buscaglia and Bianchi Vilelli 2016; Gómez Otero 2007).

Indigenous camps were not identified in the area of Fuerte San José either, and the stratigraphic association with materials of a Native or ambiguous origin is relatively lower compared with Floridablanca, particularly considering the fort was occupied for 31 years. Archaeological research revealed a higher representation of archaeofaunal remains with the dominance of European species (i.e., sheep, cows, horses, and hens), European pottery (Spanish earthenware like blue on white and polychromic majolica, olive jars, red glazed ware, creamware, clay pipes, and modern sherds), metal (a button from a Spanish navy uniform, a piece of lead ammunition, and unidentifiable remains), glass (i.e., mainly gin and wine bottles, drinking glasses), and lastly, lithic artifacts (see Table 5). Regarding archaeofaunal remains, there is a limited representation of *Lama guanicoe*—despite being available— among identified species, also reflected in other local large species, as opposed to Floridablanca. Similar to the latter case, indigenous pottery was not recovered among the archaeological remains. Just one glass bead of the bugle type was recovered and no glass instruments typical of indigenous technological techniques. Lithic artifacts were mainly concentrated in the excavated sectors at San José 1 and San José 5. The former accounted for 12 artifacts: five flakes, two European gunflints, two indeterminate artifacts, a scraper, a chunk, and a piece of debris. San José 5 yielded five artifacts: a hammer stone, a grinding tool, a preform, a core, and an ecofact.

From the two sites studied, Puesto de la Fuente presented the most significant evidence of indigenous occupations in the nearby area (Fig. 9, also see Table 6). Excavations in Structure 1 showed few remains— mainly European fauna, a gin bottle from the second half of the nineteenth century, and an iron nail— while the remains found on the surface are mainly concentrated on the rock outcrop over the salt pan (Concentration 1) and about 50 m to the southwest of Structure 1 (Concentration 2). The first concentration was a mixed archaeological record with lithic remains being dominant. The techno-typological analysis suggested an indigenous origin due to manufacturing techniques and the types of artifacts present—i.e., flakes, scrapers, projectile points, and cores (Fig. 10). Other remains included modern and, to a lesser extent, late eighteenth -century objects, such as Spanish majolica, olive jars, clay pipes, and fragments of bottles similar to the ones found at Fuerte San José. Surface archaeofaunal evidence indicated the dominance of indeterminate remains followed by European species—*Ovis sp.*, *Bos taurus*— and local species— *Zaedyus pichiy*; *Pterocnemia pennata*. It should be mentioned that the accumulation found on the rock outcrop is a palimpsest, probably resulting from discard activities—by both indigenous and Spanish creole populations—looting, re-deposition, and exposure to the natural dynamics of the environment. The second concentration presented lithic artifacts, followed by bone, glass and metal

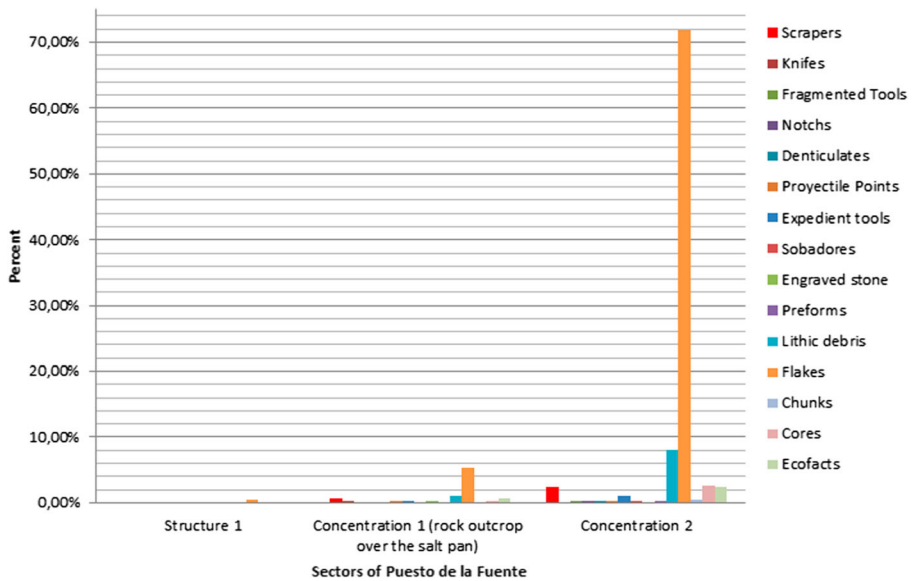


**Fig. 9** Lithic artifacts recovered at Puesto de la Fuente: (a) and (b) scrapers, denticulate and arrow points, chalcedony, silica and, basic vulcanite, (c) stone modified by use, siltstone, (d) slapper, silicified siltstone, (e) engraved plaque, metamorphic rock and, (f) *sobador*, silicified siltstone (photographs by J. Alberti and S. Buscaglia)

remains (see Table 6). Both assemblages were similar; the second, however, yielded a greater frequency and diversity of lithics (Fig. 10).

The analyses performed indicated that both assemblages would have resulted from indigenous residential occupations, dating back to the period between the middle-late Holocene and European contact. However, evidence is not solid enough to consider this record contemporary to the Spanish occupation (Alberti and Buscaglia 2015).

Although the introduction of European cattle was an attractive element for indigenous populations, the settlement of Puesto de la Fuente would probably have also implied some restrictions to key resources in the Patagonian desert environment. Among them, permanent fresh water springs, salt, prey animals,



**Fig. 10** Percent distribution of lithic artifacts recovered at Puesto de la Fuente

and pasture grasses in horse-riding times were essential in a location reused for long in the annual mobility circuits, particularly in later periods (Alberti and Buscaglia 2015; Buscaglia 2015a; Gómez Otero 2007). As I have indicated, the references to mainly hostile relationships in both sites suggest a reduction of indigenous residential occupations in the surroundings during the Spanish colonizing period. However, after the destruction of Fuerte San José, indigenous populations continued settling the peninsula, benefiting from the wild cattle which started to reproduce naturally (Bustos 1993; Dumrauf 1991).

### *Interethnic Relationships, Tensions, and Hostility*

The information presented so far provides evidence of the vulnerability of Fuerte San José and Puesto de la Fuente due to the abandonment and lack of assistance by viceroyalty authorities. The situation was probably noticed by the indigenous populations, who may have taken advantage of this condition in a number of ways.

For the time being it is still not possible to precisely define the causes for hostility. Nevertheless, I believe they should be interpreted not only in terms of the theft of cattle and the usurpation of the territory, but also in connection with the changes produced both in the indigenous societies and in the colonial settlements in Patagonia at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. For the Tehuelches, *cacique* Julián Camelo's murder as well as the disappearance of both Floridablanca and Puerto Deseado would have implied the loss of direct sources for Spanish articles and allies.

Considering that the situation in the Floridablanca colony validates the peaceful coexistence of both groups, with reports of mutual aid between the indigenous, Spanish, and creole populations and a constant flow of material culture, the rupture of this model in Fuerte San José poses some questions. I understand that part of the answer rests on the poorer material conditions of Fuerte San José. It must have prevented a regular



policy of feasting and exchange –both in formal and informal contexts– with indigenous populations, the social event which could have facilitated negotiations for assistance and alliances. Hence, it remains to be analyzed why the fort did not receive the supplies needed to interact with local populations. It may be that the viceroyalty underestimated the indigenous presence due to the isolated situation in Fuerte San José during its first years. The scarcity of material resources, the image of poverty reflected in the precarious facilities of the fort, the annual replacement of its majors, and the intrusion in a territory of valuable resources for indigenous groups may have negatively affected the future of the settlement in terms of their relationship with local populations.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Considering the results presented, I understand the negotiations and tensions observed in the organization of interethnic relationships were articulated following the ambivalent logics of natives' practices. The relationships between indigenous peoples and colonists, as well as the contact with other ethnic parties, would have ranged from hostile to friendly situations depending on the specific circumstances and interests of the moment.

As both sides of the coin, the results summarized in this article broadly present the variable nature –in both practices and materiality– of interethnic relationships in the frame of the colonizing plan, where in many cases the same actors participated even though occupying different scenarios. The role of materiality, together with the conditions and heterogeneity structuring interethnic and power relationships in Patagonia by the end of the eighteenth century, invites us to consider how effective colonial domination actually was on indigenous populations. The isolation, unfamiliarity with the environment, limited military force, diseases, scarcity, and precariousness; in sum, the instability which characterized the colonies, fundamentally in their initial phases, demands considering the strategic management Native populations imposed on these small and marginal settlements.

On the one hand, in the case of Floridablanca the relationships between the colony and the Tehuelches were based on complementarity and dependence. Nevertheless, negotiation, honoring, and satisfaction of Natives' demands were the sole alternative in an extremely vulnerable context, given the isolation of the fort, the presence of families in the settlement, and the lack of colonial assistance. This situation imprinted great complexity on the definition of interethnic relationships in this scenario. Despite the peaceful and daily relations existing between both populations, control was always in the hands of the Tehuelches. Although in this specific context they opted for negotiating with the dwellers, uncertainty was always threatened the colonial project.

Fuerte San José was in the opposite situation to Floridablanca. Left on its own, the fort did not receive the material and symbolic resources needed to be positioned as a desirable and strategic ally for Native populations. The scarcity of goods and the poverty of its facilities–when compared with Floridablanca– as well as the seizure of a territory with an atypical supply of natural resources might have modified the course of interethnic relationships in the peninsula. The impossibility of negotiating or satisfying local populations generated tensions which eventually decided the future of this post, despised by both colonial and indigenous authorities. Fuerte San José was in fact

the only one of the three settlements that was destroyed by an indigenous attack; a real exception in the colonial context studied.

The comparative analysis of interethnic relationships in the context of the Spanish colonies and forts in Patagonia at the end of the eighteenth century concludes depicting a situation similar to the "Native Ground" model, where the scale of power relations leaned toward the Native groups (Du Val 2006). From this viewpoint, the power and agency of indigenous populations as active agents in structuring interethnic and power relationships must be acknowledged, introducing tension in the colonial order established in Patagonia at the end of the eighteenth century. Even the limited reach of colonialism in the area was the result of the cracks, uncertainties and fissures which the colonial power itself created when advancing, such as the lack of effective control and assistance to the furthestmost Patagonian colonies and forts.

Finally, rather than reproducing models of traditional dichotomy, I prefer a perspective which, considering both the heterogeneity and singularities of the actors and settings during the colonial period, emphasizes the ambivalence, autonomy, and, above all, the agency of indigenous actors to create possibilities in and set limitations to the colonial order in the furthestmost end of South America. Neglecting this side of the coin perpetuates the assignation of a passive role and the lack of awareness regarding indigenous people's agency in the creation and reconfiguration of the modern world, even if it is framed by the resistance fights, the deep power asymmetries, and the cruel disintegration processes generated by colonialism. According to Gosden (2001: 247), the colonial experience was much more contradictory and complex than the histories emphasizing either domination or resistance, and the exclusive participation of the Western World in the creation of modernity.

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