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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

AMERINDIANS IN THE IBERIAN WORLD

Maria Regina Celestino de Almeida and Tatiana Seijas

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the varied means by which Amerindian peoples came into contact with Iberians and how indigenous societies negotiated their interactions with imperial actors like bureaucrats, churchmen, and colonists. The focus is on showing Amerindians as historical agents who shaped the development of colonial society, rather than mere objects of European policies. The Portuguese and Spanish Crowns wielded varying degrees of political sovereignty over the territories they claimed in the Americas. In vast swaths of land, indigenous people remained relatively untouched by colonial structures and instead continued to determine their own existence. This chapter thus focuses on Amerindians who lived in regions where Iberians exercised considerable political and economic power, which was usually around urban centres, mining regions, and agricultural districts.

Amerindian societies with distinct ethnic and linguistic traditions and cultural backgrounds responded in myriad ways to Iberian intrusions. While many groups collaborated with Iberian colonisers, others carried out active military campaigns against them, developing relationships in the long term that vacillated between alliances and hostilities. The wars of “conquest”, moreover, were only victorious in so far as Iberians were able to make and maintain alliances with diverse indigenous societies. These wars, alongside mass epidemics, the ongoing enslavement of indigenous peoples, the imposition of forced labour regimes, and the destabilisation of certain forms of native social organisation were all responsible for demographic catastrophes, as well as the disappearance or re-articulation of an untold number of ethnicities throughout the Americas. Scholars have had controversial debates over the size of populations in the New World prior to European contact, but ongoing research reveals very high densities. Demographic estimates vary considerably but suffice it to say that in the first decade of the sixteenth century, central Mexico had a population of between 12 and 15 million, and Peru between nine and 12 million (Cook 2004; Covey, Childs, and Kippen 2011; Storey 2012). The calculations for Brazil stand between two and four million people, but the numbers may be considerably higher given the five to six million estimate for the Amazon region alone.
Overall, population everywhere plummeted after contact with the process of colonisation, constituting a horrifying demographic disaster (Henige 1998; Alchon 2003). The underlining violence of the Iberian colonial project did not, however, impede Amerindians from finding ways to flourish in new colonial settings and developing adaptive forms of resistance (Salomon and Schwartz 1999; Stern 1987). In colonised areas, indigenous people actively sought to ameliorate their subject status and access rights and protections conferred to them by the Iberian Crowns. In this sense, they benefited from laws issued by the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns that sought to protect their Indian allies as vassals, even as they waged wars against “enemy” Indians.

In spite of some divergences, indigenous peoples in the Spanish and Portuguese America experienced similar socioeconomic and cultural processes. Recent scholarship has emphasised the need to examine this history in a combined yet comparative perspective. As such, this chapter is divided into two sections with parallel content and focusing on key themes for understanding the Amerindian experience in the Iberian world.

The early conquest period is the first topic of each section, with the shared emphasis that Iberians relied on violence against indigenous peoples, as well as alliances with them, to take control over territories. In both spheres, Amerindians took part in military campaigns to further their own interests. A second topic relates to the missionary projects targeted towards diverse indigenous communities, and how Amerindians navigated these Church initiatives, such as in the Jesuit Missions in South America. Catechism in these arenas served a double function; it was a tool for Iberians to impose new cultural norms, as well as an instrument by which Indians affirmed their rights as Christian subjects to their respective monarchs.

Amerindians from central and peripheral regions maintained close interactions, so the third topic deals with how native societies navigated internal and external borders. Regional studies have discredited erroneous distinctions once made between sedentary and “barbarian” Indians, or “colonised” versus “frontier” Indians (Jong and Rodriguez 2005; Almeida and Ortelli 2012). Finally, the chapter covers the impact of the Bourbon and Pombaline Reforms, which differentiated between Indians living in frontier versus urban regions, as well as how native communities responded to these policies. The conclusion highlights similarities and differences between the two Iberian spheres, with an emphasis on how imperial policies towards indigenous peoples changed over time in response to local and external factors.

**SPANISH AMERICA**

**Introduction**

The Spanish “conquest” of America was a drawn-out and incomplete process. Historians once wrote of victorious Spanish conquistadors and vanquished Amerindians, but this simplification of Amerindian-Spanish interactions is now invalid. Spaniards certainly used great violence to gain territorial control over distinct regions in the Americas, but they also relied on alliances with Indians to achieve this end (Matthew and Oudijk 2007). More pointedly, in the long term, Spaniards were only able to wield economic and political power in those places where there were
Image 17.1 “Map of America” by Jodocus Hondius (Amsterdam, 1619)
Source: Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University, Providence, USA
pre-existing indigenous states with large bureaucracies and hierarchical organisation, primarily the lands of the Mexica (Aztec) and Inka empires. The territories where Amerindians societies had smaller modes of social organisation and were based on semi-sedentary economies remained largely independent. This geopolitical reality makes for a far more complicated history of the colonial period than was once told.

A number of “myths” underlay traditional narratives of Spanish conquests, most famously of Mexico and Peru (Restall 2003). The year 1521 marked the end of the political entity known as the Triple-Alliance, but everyday life for most inhabitants in the Central Valley of Mexico remained relatively unchanged for decades to come, as evident, for example, in the cultural resilience of Nahuatl and other indigenous languages, which continued to be used for governmental record keeping and the writing of native history (Lockhart 1992; Townsend 2018). Native lords, moreover, continued to wield considerable governing power (Yannakakis 2008; Connell 2011; Benton 2017). The conquest of Peru was a similarly non-terminal event. The dynasty of Huascar Capac ended with the death of his sons, but Andean communities remained socially vibrant. Even large-scale colonial projects like the Great Resettlement of Indians in the Central Andes, ordered in 1569, served to strengthen native lords (Mumford 2012). This stress on the survival of native social organisations and cultures is a necessary corrective to outdated ideas about Spanish victories and Indian defeats. The early colonisation of Spanish America also included brutal military expeditions, the onslaught of epidemic diseases, and the horrors of indigenous enslavement, but these aspects of history should not obscure indigenous resilience and survival (Cook 1998; Zavala 1967; Seijas 2014).

The focus here is on those regions of the Americas where the Spanish colonial bureaucracy actually governed, which was largely achieved in Mexico and Peru through the legal incorporation of indigenous peoples as vassals of the Spanish monarch (Calero 1997). The governing structure in these central regions divided the population into two distinct republics (repúblicas) or political communities (Borah 1982). The indigenous majority belonged to the Republic of Indians (República de Indios); Spaniards, free people of mixed descent, and all slaves belonged to the Republic of Spaniards (República de Españoles). The structure of the republics involved residential segregation, separate local governments, and distinct courts, which provided legal structure and certain rights to all native vassals, including protection from enslavement. According to the policy of residential segregation, Indians were supposed to live in indigenous neighbourhoods (barrios de indios) or villages (pueblos de indios) headed by indigenous leaders (Gonzále-Hermosillo 2001; Gutiérrez 1993). This form of organisation generally required the coerced movement of indigenous communities to new settlements called congregations (congregación in Mexico) and reductions (reducción in Peru).

Apart from the government’s purported objective of isolating Indians from corrupt colonists, the primary basis for residential segregation was to ensure the orderly collection of tribute (Mörner 1970). Even though the Spanish government entrusted tax collection to local indigenous leaders, it was easier to maintain census figures and calculate tribute amounts and labour obligations if indigenous people lived together. Amerindians, as such, were discouraged from leaving their place of birth, and, if they did, individuals were supposed to report to local authorities to be included as tributaries in their new place of residence. Many, of course, did not,
especially if they left rural communities to live in urban areas where they sought freedom from tributary obligations (Wightman 1990).

Tribute was a heavy burden, (Natives in Mexico City-Tenochtitlan, for example, had to pay numerous taxes: a uniform head tax (tributo personal); a cathedral-construction tax (medio real de fábrica), a service tax for royal expenses (servicio real); and the legal protection tax (medio real de ministros), but it accorded Indians certain rights and privileges (Gibson 1964). The colonial government, for example, encouraged Amerindians’ engagement in the market economy through small-scale trading privileges, partly to facilitate the payment of tribute in cash. Amerindians, as such, were generally the only people who were legally allowed to sell native products, generally called fruits of the earth (frutas de la tierra), which included fruits, vegetables, fowl, and firewood, among other merchandise, and to do so without having to pay sales tax (alcabala) on goods sold. Indigenous traders claimed these incentives to make gains by building on short- and long-distance networks of exchange that existed prior to contact and by building new ones (Ouweneel and Torales Pacheco 1988; Glave Testino 1989; Seijas 2018). In Spanish settlements, Indians found buyers for native trading commodities like pine nuts. This interaction also fostered indigenous industry and the manufacture of new goods, such as leather equipment for horses, in ways that enabled Indians to gain from the circulation of capital (i.e., tradable representation of value).

Spain’s legal apparatus was charged with protecting the legal rights of Amerindians, generally through the Protector of Indians office, which was first tied to ecclesiastical and then secular courts (Saravia Salazar 2012; Puente Luna 2018). The General Indian Court (Juzgado de General de Naturales) in Mexico City, for example, was established in the early 1590s to oversee the legal affairs of the Republic of Indians in New Spain. The body was responsible for the “good government” and “prompt administration” of matters relating to the indigenous population (Borah 1983). The Juzgado provided legal counsel and served as a place where Amerindians could seek justice. It dispensed major civil (often related to land disputes) and criminal cases and attended to appeals sent from the lower courts by indigenous governors and councillors, who carried out justice for minor crimes at the local level (Stavig 2000). The court also issued special dispensations, writs of protection (amparos), and individual licenses. Amerindian merchants, for example, could acquire a trading license if they found themselves harassed by contracted sales-tax collectors. Overall, the high functionality of this court is a testament to Spanish bureaucratic process and the Spanish Crown’s commitment to governing an “empire of law” (Owensby 2008).

Spanish missionary project

Spain’s missionary enterprise followed a similar trajectory to colonisation; Christianity made significant inroads in the urban centres of Mexico and Peru, and less so in peripheral regions. There was no generalised “spiritual conquest” (Ricard 1966; Crewe 2019). Many regions of Spanish America became very devoutly Catholic, but popular religious practices everywhere were far from orthodox (Charles 2010). Indigenous peoples, moreover, tended to adapt Christian beliefs in ways that corresponded to ancestral cosmologies (Sigal 2000). Notably, churchmen at the time were well aware of native people’s ambivalence towards Catholicism,
which is why such great efforts were made to create indigenous language catechisms and translate other religious texts (Burkhart 1989; Durston 2007; Christensen 2013). The hope was that Christian doctrine would be better understood and embraced if articulated in Amerindians’ native tongues. The Church hierarchy also carried out ongoing campaigns to expurgate idolatrous practices, which similarly points to the sometimes-limited success of conversion (Tavárez 2011; Mills 1997).

The Spanish Crown charged religious orders (regular clergy) with the organisation and implementation of the missionary project among Amerindians, while secular clergy (priests) focused on ministering to the Republic of Spaniards. Chief among the orders were the Franciscans, Augustinians, Dominicans, and Jesuits. The administration of this enterprise was most complete in the urban regions of Spanish America, where regular clergy led doctrinal parishes (called doctrinas) out of specified churches, which were generally connected to monasteries. The separation of Indians from other Christian parishioners was based on the idea that they required special instruction as newcomers to the faith.

Religious orders similarly ran the ministry of Amerindians in frontier regions, with mission towns (misiones) acting as the base organisational unit. The rise of misiones began after the issuance of the “Orders for New Discoveries” in 1573. This royal decree specified that missionaries (as opposed to soldiers) were to be primary agents of colonisation, with “pacification” replacing “conquest”. Henceforth, this “pacification” of newly contacted indigenous peoples required them to move to mission towns organised along Spanish lines.

Much beyond pastoral care, this form of living arrangement served the economic interests of surrounding Spanish ventures, such as mining in Northern Mexico, because tribute labour was often administered through the missions (Deeds 2003). Exploitative practices in missions were thus relatively commonplace, and Amerindians regularly left them when they no longer received material advantages from remaining (Radding Murrieta 1997). Missions, however, also became sites of Amerindian economic agency and independent administration. The Guarani missions of the Rio de la Plata region, for example, remained highly functional economic units after the Jesuit Expulsion in 1768 (Sarreal 2014). Recent re-drawings of mission life thus emphasise the varied lived realities of so-called mission Indians (Wilde 2009).

Interethnic relations

The ethno-linguistic diversity and settlement patterns of Amerindian societies in Spanish territories made for a complicated sociocultural landscape. The simplest distinction was between sedentary and more mobile societies, each of whose economies were based on the ecology of their different geographic ranges. Prior to contact and in almost all areas, groups of agriculturalists and pastoralists maintained close interactions through trading networks, which remained in place to varying degrees throughout the colonial period.

The Spanish government did, however, implement certain policies that changed the nature of this interaction, mostly by encouraging town-based societies to take part in the colonial project. Tlaxcaltecan society exemplifies this pattern. This ethnic group of Nahua speakers from Tlaxcala in Central Mexico allied with Spaniards to
colonise northern territories, like present-day Nuevo León, that were inhabited by largely nomadic societies, which were despairingly grouped as Chichimecas (Valdés 1995). In these northern regions, Tlaxcaltecans established towns near Spanish settlements to continue the military alliance and purportedly to serve as an example for non-agriculturalists (Frye 1996; McEnroe 2012). Indigenous historical memories of Aztlan (Nahua ancestral land in Northern Mexico) were central in encouraging these movements as a kind of back migration, as was the case for Amerindians who accompanied, and perhaps led, Spaniards to New Mexico (Levin Rojo 2014).

**Bourbon reforms**

The Bourbon Reforms had the greatest impact among independent Amerindian societies in frontier regions, where Spain’s “enlightened” policies wavered between desiring peace versus extermination (Weber 2005). In some borderland territories, officials improved relations with Amerindians through gift exchanges when Spaniards generally offered market goods in exchange for ceasefires. The military instability in such places, however, also encouraged soldiers to seek a more permanent solution, mainly by eradicating societies that continued to resist Spanish sovereignty over their lands. The Bourbon’s desire to tighten their political control over these Amerindian populations generally failed, and a state of warfare continued into the national period, for example between Mapuche Indians and the Chilean government. A number of indigenous societies throughout Latin America never experienced Spanish colonialism, which is a reminder of the need to question and reconsider political and geographical categories like “Spanish America”.

**PORTUGUESE AMERICA**

**Wars of conquest and the implementation of aldeamentos**

Contrary to the image of a relatively peaceful occupation, the Portuguese territories in America were acquired through violent wars of conquest involving a number of Amerindian peoples from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, and in which they played major roles as either friends or foes (Hemming 1978). Mortality rates were extremely high. Despite also being those who suffered the most by these wars, Amerindians’ actions and choices were decisive to the outcome.

Identifying and categorising indigenous societies was essential to the imperial enterprise. The Portuguese made distinctions between Amerindian peoples based on criteria that reflected their own interests and their misapprehensions about the languages and the sociocultural characteristics of Amerindian peoples. Thus, different ethno-linguistic groups were referred to indiscriminately as Indians and divided between allies and enemies of the Portuguese. As for ethnic designations, apart from the creation of new ethnonyms, often appropriated by the native peoples themselves, all were eventually subsumed under the broad and generic categories of Tupis and Tapuias (Monteiro 2001). The former, who were divided into various subgroups, predominated in the coastal regions of Brazil and had the most intensive contacts with the colonisers (Fausto 2000). For them, relations with the “other” through exchange, marriage, and war were essential. Tupis were consequently
extremely open to contacts that incorporated the Europeans into the dynamic of intertribal relations as either allies or enemies (Fernandes 1989; Viveiros de Castro 1992). Tapuia was the name used by Tupis for other natives, and the Portuguese adopted both the term and its meaning. The Tapuia also comprised innumerable distinct groups, who were in general warier of interaction with the newcomers than the coastal Tupis. Nevertheless, both the Tupis and the Tapuias at various times formed alliances with or against the Europeans, and the relations between different Amerindian peoples, and between them and the Portuguese were fluid and unstable.

Portuguese presence on the coast was intermittent in the opening three decades of the sixteenth century, and their contacts with Amerindians at this time was relatively less disruptive, though the consequences of these relations were already evident: high mortality, the collapse of sociocultural structures, the intensification of warfare, greater incidence of epidemics, and enslavement. During this period, the principal source of wealth for the colonists was Brazilwood, the export of which was the subject of competition between the French and the Portuguese, rivals also for the allegiance of the Amerindians with whom they established trade relations (Marchant 1942). Meanwhile the latter made alliances, trade agreements, and wars in line with their own interests that often diverged from the economic logic of the Europeans (Schwartz 1985; Monteiro 2018).

As the Portuguese occupation of the land became more systematic in the 1530s with the creation of hereditary captaincies (1534), the colonists’ demand for slaves increased. This need for labour provoked violent reactions from the Indians, which in turn were largely responsible for the failure of many of the new administrative divisions. Wars against other Europeans—mainly the French—for dominion over the land also became more frequent and involved various indigenous peoples. These wars became intertwined with indigenous intertribal wars, which became much more violent. Would-be conquistadors of various European countries vied for invaluable indigenous support, while Amerindians did not hesitate to take advantage of inter-European squabbles for their purposes, obeying the dynamic of their own societies (Monteiro 2018). If the Europeans were intent on controlling territory and procuring slaves, the Tupis were determined to defeat their indigenous rivals and obtain prisoners for ritual sacrifice (Fernandes 1989). All along the Brazilian littoral, various native peoples fought against or alongside Europeans, following the latter’s pattern of conflict. Although the Amerindians continued to switch allegiances at their convenience, as had always been their custom, would-be colonial powers sought to entrench these divisions through the increasing militarisation of indigenous societies (Ferguson and Whitehead 1992).

The arrival of the first royal-appointed governor general Tomé de Souza was intended to assert Portuguese sovereignty over their claimed colony against rival European powers, but also, and perhaps above all, to facilitate the integration of “friendly” Indians, and subjugate those who remained outside Portuguese control. The royal ordinances by Souza contained the basic principles that generally guided Portuguese policy towards Brazilian Amerindians for the remainder of the colonial period (Perrone-Moisés 1992). A basic distinction was made between “tame or friendly” (allies) and “savage” or “barbarian” (enemies) Indians; the former would be reduced to pacified villages or aldeias; while Just War was to be waged on the latter, who would be enslaved upon being vanquished. Just War was a theological
argument positing that war could be declared on the enemies of Christianity, and it was employed by both Iberian powers to justify the capture and enslavement of hostile indigenous peoples who resisted colonisation and refused to convert to Christianity (Solórzano Pereira 1994). As a legal concept, Just War endured for virtually the entirety of the colonial period, in spite of numerous crown ordinances that sought to curb the excesses of colonists and local authorities. In Brazil, another legal justification with a religious sanction for the enslavement of Amerindians was the ransoming of captives, or the practice of exchanging prisoners of war with allied groups who were then sold into slavery (Perrone-Moisés 1992). To escape extermination or enslavement, large numbers of indigenous peoples chose settlement in aldeias and were thus incorporated into colonial institutions and legal structures. Portuguese legislation towards Indians varied throughout the colonial period, but was generally characterised as a series of decrees and laws that succeeded one another in ways that sometimes annulled previous dictates according to the interests of the authorities who issued them and those who lobbied for them, including Indians (Perrone-Moisés 1992; Almeida 2003).

The crown and the Church cooperated in the implementation of the policy of aldeamentos, central to colonisation, which was designed to reduce allied Indians to large aldeias close to major Portuguese urban centres where they might be more easily Christianised and re-socialised. Their transformation into Christian subjects was meant to enable the crown to shore up and even expand the frontiers of the colony, while also ensuring a supply of manual labour for colonists and missionaries. Jesuits arrived with Tomé de Souza, and it was they who were primarily responsible for the establishment of the colonial aldeias (Castelnau-L'estoille 2000; Metcalf 2014).

Parallel to the policy of aldeamentos, the colonial government continued to carry out intermittent warfare against hostile Amerindians until the nineteenth century. Some of these were major conflicts, involving large military forces and numerous indigenous groups (Puntoni 2000; Almeida 2003). But countless others waged to quell localised Indian revolts by those who refused to collaborate with the Portuguese. In general, these occurred on the colonial frontiers, in the sertões (backlands) inhabited by the so-called “savages”, who defended their territories and impeded Portuguese colonial expansion, while also occasionally carrying out armed incursions into occupied areas (Russell-Wood 2005; Langfur and Chaves de Resende 2014). A number of these groups maintained their independence from Portuguese administration into the nineteenth century. Such was the case of the Botocudos, Caiapós, Xavantes, Guaicurus, Muras e Kaingangs, among others. Even though these societies had intermittent contact with aldeados (Indians in villages) and non-Indians, many of them were only incorporated through the expansionistic politics of the Brazilian state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Cunha 1992; Langfur and Chaves de Resende 2014). Wars of conquest as well as defensive wars persisted until the nineteenth century, continuously shaping the negotiation, strategies, and treaties between the authorities (civil and ecclesiastical), the colonists, and the Indians. Colonial wars, just wars, the numerous punitive and/or slaving expeditions, went hand in hand with the policy of aldeamentos since they made it harder for Amerindians to survive on the sertões and compelled them to reach an accommodation with the Portuguese and settle in aldeias.
The colonial aldeias: re-socialisation and the remaking of culture and identity

Although their purpose was religious indoctrination and the re-socialisation of indigenous peoples, and ultimately their integration into the Portuguese administrative structures, the colonial aldeias were not simply spaces of domination and of cultural imposition by the Jesuit fathers over the Amerindians, as suggested by the historiography. The profusion of laws regulating their growth and operation, as well as the numerous and varied disputes surrounding these settlements indicate not only their importance, but also the divergent expectations of different actors. Amerindians, missionaries, local authorities, and the colonists all attributed different functions and meanings to the aldeias and used the colonial legal system to advance their claims. Indians participated actively in these legal disputes, whose records make it possible to identify some of their motivations in settling in these aldeias. Land rights, and protection from the ravages of war and mass enslavement were their basic expectations in treaties with the Portuguese. The colonial aldeias appeared to the Amerindians as a lesser evil, a space that held out the possibility of survival in the colony (Almeida 2003). A very similar process occurred elsewhere in the Americas. The missions were not simply a blueprint imposed on the Indians; these communities evolved through multi-stranded processes of negotiation often fraught with conflict (Levin Rojo and Radding 2019).

Indians paid a brutal price for this difficult choice, for they became subject to various forms of discrimination and forced labour, and also had to abandon (at least outwardly) their religion and culture and accept the imposition of Catholicism and European customs. However, by settling in aldeias, Indians became Christian vassals of the king, and thus assumed the status of a distinct social group within the colonial order. Along with many obligations, this status brought with it certain rights, including access to the commons within aldeias and exemption from enslavement—rights they vigorously strived to defend into the nineteenth century.

Indian vassals of the Portuguese Crown did not have their own court system as they did in Spanish America, but they nonetheless enjoyed guaranteed legal protections. Colonial law offered Indians various ways of accessing justice. The Rules of the Missions of 1686 provided the basic guidelines for the organisation and functioning of the aldeias for almost a century. Father Antonio Vieria’s influence resulted in this regiment being first proposed for Amazonia, but was also applied to aldeias in other regions, and remained in force until it was replaced by the Directory of the Indians (Diretório que se deve observar nas Povoações dos Índios do Pará e Maranhão) in 1757 as part of the Pombaline Reforms (Beozzo 1983; Almeida 1997). Fear and violence, essential elements to the formation of aldeias, could not alone guarantee their proper functioning, which points to the necessity of legal structures.

The re-socialisation of the Amerindians was a complex process that apart from outright imposition also involved high levels of negotiation, especially with indigenous elites who were central to the growth and development of the aldeias. Civic and ecclesiastical authorities rewarded these leaders for their important role as intermediaries with coveted posts, titles, offices, and privileges (Domingues 2000; Raminelli 2009; Almeida 2003; Sommer 2014; Carvalho Júnior 2017).
By focusing on how converts understood and employed Catholicism and other new cultural elements, recent research has revealed the complexity of Indians’ relationships with missionaries, as well as their agency in acquiring the necessary tools to adapt to colonial governance. There is abundant evidence that Jesuits made considerable concessions regarding the retention of indigenous cultural elements, as well as the appropriation of Catholic practices as redefined by the Indians (Pompa 2003; Carvalho Júnior 2017). Daily life in the aldeias, included the re-articulation of old indigenous traditions in the face of new cultural and civic practices introduced by the Jesuit fathers, which Indians skilfully used to petition the king for favours in exchange for services rendered. In their petitions to the authorities, Amerindians used their baptismal names and acted as the representatives of the aldeias in which they lived, assuming the generic identity they had been given or which had been imposed on them: aldeado Indians and Christian vassals of the king (Almeida 2003).

Interethnic relations

The complex and multifaceted relations between the inhabitants of the aldeias and the sertões, and Indians and non-Indians, belie the notion that there was a rigid opposition between the colony and the sertão, or between “tame” and “savage” Indians (Almeida and Ortelli 2012). The Amerindians of the sertões did not live in absolute isolation from the colonial world. They continually came and went, and often negotiated with the colonists, missionaries, and the authorities. Numerous studies on the internal and external frontier regions have revealed the full range and variety of these interactions, including wars, cultural and commercial exchanges between the indigenous peoples of the aldeias, those of the sertões, and non-Indians. For instance, during the eighteenth century, the Caiapós, Guaicurus, and Paiaguás in Matto Grosso changed their mutual relations from conflict to alliance in response to Portuguese incursions into their territories, while also exploiting the rivalries among the Europeans. These peoples also intermittently inserted themselves into colonial trade circuits, trading in cattle and other goods, often stolen in one region and sold in another. The Paiaguás, for example, frequently sold their Portuguese, African, and mixed-race captives in Paraguay (Kok 2004). This kind of exchange facilitated their independence until the nineteenth century.

The interaction among the peoples of the sertões, and between them and non-Amerindians, changed with the intensification of conflicts and a new wave of colonial expansion during the eighteenth century, which resulted from either Pombaline legislation that encouraged interactions with indigenous populations, or the escalation of border disputes between Portugal and Spain, especially after the signing of the Treaty of Madrid. Beyond violence, Portuguese relations with the peoples who remained outside the colonial order also involved a great deal of negotiation, above all in times of war. Neither the pacified Indians of the aldeias nor the so-called savages of the sertões simply accepted the places and roles assigned to them in the indigenous policy of the colonial authorities. They continued to maintain fluid relations with one another and with the colonists, and to circulate across internal and external frontiers of the empire. The need to counter the perceived threat posed by “savages” rendered the Portuguese dependent on good relations with their native allies, thereby
strengthening the bargaining power of their leaders—a situation that persisted until the nineteenth century (Farage 1991; Garcia 2009; Almeida 2010; Sampaio 2012).

Relations between Indians and Africans remain understudied in Portuguese America, but it is certain that they interacted frequently in aldeias, quilombos (maroon communities), ranches, plantations, urban centres, and in the sertões (Karash 2016). Such interactions varied from quotidian living and intermarriage to antagonism and persecution. Allied Indians, for instance, frequently participated in punitive expeditions organised by colonial authorities against quilombos, fugitive slaves, and enemy Indians. Africans (free and enslaved) and Indians (aldeados or enemies) joined together and parted ways in these expeditions, which gained them standing and negotiated power in the colonial order.

Pombal’s Indian policy: assimilationism, negotiation, and resistance

In the mid-eighteenth century, the Marquis of Pombal introduced changes to the Indian policy of the Portuguese Crown. The new law, known as the Directory of the Indians or the Pombaline Directory, generally maintained the basic directives of previous policies, such as the division between allied versus enemy Indians, obligatory labour for aldeados, their status as minors (under the Director of Indians), and the guarantee of collective land within the aldeias. The most significant change was the introduction of the policy of assimilation, which aimed to transform the aldeias into Portuguese towns and “civilise” the Amerindians, so that they would be indistinguishable from the rest of the king’s vassals. A number of innovations were established following this logic. The Law of Liberties (1755) prohibited the enslavement of Indians under all circumstances, and the Law of Marriage (1755) promoted mixed matrimony. The Directory also prohibited all forms of discrimination against Indians and encouraged non-Indians to settle in aldeias. At the same time, efforts were made to eradicate the use of indigenous languages and customs in the hope of hastening their disappearance as distinct groups. Jesuit expulsion in 1759 meant that Directors of Indians (diretores de índios) replaced them as the administrators of the aldeamentos (Almeida 1997).

The new laws, however, were applied selectively, depending on the region and the characteristics of the inhabitants. War was waged on the “savages” of the sertões in order to corral them into new aldeias. The “tame” Amerindians already long settled in aldeias, on the other hand, became the subject of discourses arguing that because they were civilised, their separate aldeias no longer served a purpose and should be abolished.

The new policies provoked a variety of reactions from those affected. Many Indians fled, some rebelled, while others took advantage of the new laws to secure offices, claim rights, and demand protection—above all from illegal enslavement, encroachment on their lands, and the extinction of their aldeias with their associated land rights (Domingues 2000; Martins Lopes 2005; Silva 2005; Almeida 2010; Sampaio 2012; Roller 2014). They defended their rights by reasserting their identity as indigenous peoples and invoking the longstanding treaties with the crown. These disputes continued until the mid-nineteenth century, when the Brazilian Empire abolished many of the old aldeias—a policy that maintained the assimilationist approach pioneered by Pombal (Cunha 1992; Silva 1996; Silva 2005; Almeida 2010).
CONCLUSION

Amerindian responses to Iberian incursions varied a great deal, shaped as they were by the particular needs of each society and in response to changing external dynamics. There were outright military hostilities, episodes involving trade, and also collaborative efforts to join European ranks and vanquish existing political structures. Amerindians were active historical subjects who developed multiple strategies to survive European colonialism and secure their own interests.

The complexity of human interactions in this vast expanse cannot be reduced to colonial categories and institutions. As noted, Iberian colonisation and occupation of American territories would have been impossible without Amerindian allies, who took advantage of changing geopolitical circumstances to advance their own interests. Recent scholarship has overturned simplistic schemas that once divided indigenous combatants into two monolithic camps: allies versus enemies (Restall and Martin 2013). Moreover, in territories subjected to Iberian sovereignty, Portuguese and Spanish settlers continued to rely on Amerindians to construct colonial societies, of which they were an integral part.

The organisation of indigenous communities located within the Spanish and Portuguese spheres shared some commonalities. In the Spanish sphere, indigenous government remained largely independent, especially through municipal councils (cabildos), though churchmen administered mission towns more directly. In Portuguese America, on the other hand, Jesuits were the primary organisers and administrators of Indian communities. Amerindians living in the Republic of Indians, mission towns, and colonial settlements were Christian vassals of their respective kings, with rights and obligations defined by their respective laws. In spite of the demands of draft labour in both spheres, and tribute payments in Spanish America, indigenous people took advantage of their subject status via legal channels, taking their claims to Iberian courts into the nineteenth century. The Spanish legal framework via the protectorate of Indians facilitated this recourse to colonial law, but Amerindians in Brazil similarly appealed to royal justice and petitioned for favours based on their service to the crown. As evidence, Amerindians in both Portuguese and Spanish territories generally sought to mitigate conflicts via colonial legal institutions, rather than via outright rebellion. Mission towns, in this way, were not merely spaces for colonial domination, they were also communities built by Amerindians who found some benefits from congregating as Christian subjects of the king, including defence from slaving expeditions. Such was the case in missions from Southern Brazil to Northern Mexico.

Colonial legislation made distinctions between so-called friendly (sedentary) and “savage” or “barbarian” Indians, but these divisions bore little semblance to everyday relations in frontier regions, where there was free circulation among individuals residing in missions, towns, and elsewhere (Poloni-Simard 2000; Almeida and Ortelli 2012). In fact, during the second half of the eighteenth century, officials from both spheres expended great efforts to attract “savage” Indians from frontier regions into settled territories, especially, as part of the delineation of new borders required by the Treaty of Madrid.

The Bourbon and Pombaline Reforms of the eighteenth century aimed to insert Amerindians more directly into colonial society. Different strategies were targeted
towards indigenous communities living in colonial settlements versus in frontier regions. New legislation regarding land tenure, for example, sought to make communal lands more productive for colonial markets. For the most part, these governmental policies were detrimental to indigenous communities, as they served to diminish their already limited political and economic independence. By contrast, the strategy for semi-sedentary societies was to incorporate them via treaties and failing that through military force. The indigenous response, in turn, included some level of collaboration to gain concessions from the colonial order, as well as armed resistance. Whatever the colonial strategy, Amerindians everywhere had one primary concern: to preserve their collective lands for the survival of their communities.

Historical processes have transformed indigenous societies, in the same ways that change over time fundamentally altered Iberian cultures. This historical trajectory—the coming together of European and Amerindian peoples—has not resulted in the “extinction” of native cultures and identities (Mintz 1982; Barth 2000). The violence and disease of colonisation did not result in “disappearances”—as was once claimed (Reina 1997). Political and academic debates concerning the success of “civilising missions” and levels of ethnic mixing (mestizaje) have served, in part, to make indigenous peoples invisible. In most arenas, the rise of nation-states disenfranchised Amerindians, who were, until very recently, excluded from civic society. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century state formation left little space for ethnic and cultural pluralities.

Today, indigenous communities throughout Latin America have organised to secure full citizenship. Statutory directives have encouraged Indians to become involved in ethnogenesis movements and reassert their native identities in order to benefit from the rights accorded to them by national constitutions (Hill 1996; Boccara 2005). In Brazil, for example, indigenous activism, mainly in the northeast, was instrumental in securing protections in the 1988 Constitution. A similar resurgence occurred in Southern Mexico with the onset of the Zapatista movement, as well as in many other regions of Latin America. These achievements testify to the longevity and strength of indigenous cultures and identities. Amerindian societies experienced significant cultural transformations in the past 500 years, but native continuities remain.

NOTE

1 A border treaty between Portugal and Spain signed in 1750, which established the frontier between the two Americas, Spanish and Portuguese. Among other things, the treaty stipulated that Portugal would hand over the town of Colónia do Sacramento to Spain in exchange for the Seven Peoples of the Missions, which provoked many conflicts involving the Indians and Jesuits, including the Guarani War.

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