Figure 3.1  Castillo de San Marcos, located near present-day St. Augustine, Florida, and the oldest masonry fort in the continental United States.

Source: National Park Service/Wikimedia Commons.
Early in the autumn of 1540, the newly appointed adelantado of the Río de la Plata—a province that comprised portions of what are today Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay—gathered an expeditionary force of indigenous allies and some 200 Spanish settlers and set out on a 1,200-mile journey from the coast of present-day Brazil toward the provincial seat of government, Asunción. He had been charged to forge a royal road from that distant and fragile center of royal power across the Andean Cordillera into Peru. The arduous journey nearly broke the spirits of his colonial contingent, whom he inspired to forge on only by refusing to ride one of the 26 horses on the journey, walking barefoot instead to demonstrate both his toughness and humility. Once he arrived in Asunción he took charge of the province and assigned the path-forging duties to his predecessor, Domingo Martínez de Irala, then turned his attention to Indian affairs, especially as they pertained to the local Guarani peoples. Local encomenderos, he felt, had turned what the Spanish crown had intended as a relationship of mutual aid and trust—Indians would provide labor tribute in return for Catholic instruction and protection against enemies—into a one-sided exploitation of natural resources and people alike.

Irala’s efforts proved inconclusive, however, so the adelantado shouldered trailblazing duties himself, an expedition that also proved a failure. In his absence, however, Irala fomented resistance to the new governor among the encomenderos, who frantically concocted trumped-up charges of malfeasance and dispatched couriers to the royal court in Spain. Convicted of 32 specific cases of the maltreatment of his Indian charges (none of which proved true), the fallen administrator found himself sentenced to five years of confinement in the penal colony of Oran in North Africa. Although he would ultimately have his sentence commuted after a series of appeals, he remained in Spain, reputation in tatters, until he died in 1559.

Such is not the story by which we generally recall the life of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. Far better known is an earlier story, thousands of miles to the north, first published in Spain in 1542, even while his travails in Río de la Plata were being enacted. Cabeza de Vaca’s Relación, or account of his adventures between 1528 and 1536 as one of a handful of the survivors of the disastrous Pánfilo de Narváez expedition, would become the foundational work of ethnology and colonial travel literature in North America. Crossing the continent from Florida to northern Mexico with a dwindling group of survivors, finally just “four ragged castaways,” Cabeza de Vaca would undergo transformation from slave to trader to healer. Cabeza de Vaca’s narrative revealed the man’s gradual transformation from a Spaniard contemptuous of los indios salvages into one
who came to appreciate, at least within his capacity, indigenous humanity. Carrying those sentiments into his new posting as adelantado of the Rio de la Plata would ultimately result in his imprisonment, as well as cost him his career and social standing. His is also the first, and remains one of the richest, chronicles of indigenous cultures in North America, one that continues to yield insights to scholars of the Gulf Coast societies and northern Mexico. He is among those few Spanish chroniclers whose experience traverses the northern and southern borderland of the Spanish Americas, and as such provides a crucial bridge in crafting the histories of each.1

The indigenous peoples of the Rio de la Plata that Cabeza de Vaca sought to protect from exploitation included the Guarani, whose history with Jesuit missionization and Spanish colonization forms the following illustrative example of borderland processes. Like those indigenous languages that continue to be spoken in the lands across which he traveled in North America, the survival of the Guarani language even today may speak to some distant echo of his attention to their fate—although more attributable to the complex interplay of Jesuit evangelical pedagogy (and Franciscan, in the far north) and the cultural determination of the Guarani (and the Puebloan) themselves. Our focus henceforth lies in the long century that unfolded after de Vaca’s efforts to bring reform to the Platin borderlands, to suggest some processes and themes that precede David Weber’s magisterial treatment of Spanish imperial Indian policy during the Bourbon era in Bárbaros: Spaniards and their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment (2005). That period signaled a transition in tactics from relying on missionaries to serve as the agents of pacification and civilization to an era of political and military engagement with powerfully transformed equestrian nations—an implicit acknowledgement that many indigenous peoples had increased, rather than exhausted, their sense of power and autonomy in the earlier centuries. Thus, Spanish

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Figure 3.2 Map c. 1600 depicting Rio de la Plata and adjacent areas.
interactions in the early colonial Platin borderlands, and those among the Pueblos, Comanches, and Apaches in el Norte, were both a sign of the strength and the weakness of the regime.

Colonial expansionism brought opportunities for the Society of Jesus and Friars Minor Capuchin (Franciscans) to establish settlements in so-called peripheral areas such as the Rio de La Plata and the northern reaches of New Mexico. Yet it was down in the Rio de La Plata—not in other viceroyalties like New Spain and Peru, where intense political struggles between the religious and secular arms of the Empire limited missionary autonomy—that the Jesuits found opportunities to expand their political influence and missionary experiments, which might help to explain the uniqueness of the Guarani missions. On this “haunted frontier,” in Gastón Gordillo’s formulation, we observe early colonial Spanish-indigenous entanglements in their most intimate expression, as well as unexpected resonances. Jesuits would continue De Vaca’s anti-encomienda agenda and thereby cordon the Guarani off from some of the worst colonial abuses observed elsewhere. And yet, by doing so, the indigenous group would also become segregated and simplified as a “pure ethnicity” dependent for their very survival on Jesuit paternalism and ethnolinguistic fetishization. As such, the case that follows hints toward some of the most provocative rethinking of the anthropological enterprise itself, like that of Lucas Besire’s Behold the Black Caiman: A Chronicle of Ayoreo Life, whose subjects’ precarious lives are likewise conditioned by “soul collecting missionaries, humanitarian NGOs, neoliberal economic policies, and the highest deforestation rate in the world.” All too often, what’s past is prologue.
Entangled Worlds in Colonial Paraguay

For years, the survival of the Guarani language in Paraguay has attracted scholarly attention from scholars in a variety of disciplines. Even researchers who are not Latin Americanists, such as Benedict Anderson, have analyzed the pioneerism and practices of nationalism among Creoles in the Spanish Americas that relate to the Guarani language. We complicate these studies by demonstrating ways in which the Guarani and other indigenous groups from Paraguay managed to establish relations that focused missionary work on language. By analyzing the missionary context of colonial Paraguay, we see the results of a complex transcultural process experienced on the South American indigenous border. Indigenous communities therefore played a much more active role in the survival of their language than previously thought. Moreover, the Guarani language is just the “tip of the iceberg” through which we can access complex historical experiences captured by authors interested in languages.

While there are significant works showing the unmatched Guarani-missionary relations in Paraguay in terms of their benevolence, a closer look at these relations’ sociocultural context shifts our understanding of a borderland that was anything but peaceful. Instead, the borderland was characterized by nuanced complexities, especially in the early seventeenth century when ethnic and political identities were reaffirmed by institutionalized powers like the Spanish and Jesuit colonialists. Therefore the Indigenous-missionary relations in the Rio de La Plata borderlands should be characterized less by Jesuitic benevolence, and more by the everyday forms of resistance with which the indigenous community faced the missionaries in seventeenth-century Paraguay.

Due to the uniqueness of the survival of the Guarani language, as well as to classic studies such as Anderson’s, there is a common misconception that the communities now occupying what was the colonial Province of Paraguay are all descendants of Guarani-speaking groups. But recent studies have taken a more critical view of the information available about the early years, and have identified various ethnic and linguistic groups located in what would be the Río de La Plata. This body of work reflects on variations within the ethnic identity formation of the so-called Guarani groups. For instance, Baptista complicates the issue of ethnic identity among the indigenous communities in colonial Paraguay by asking questions about the “guaranization” of other ethnicities, understood as the process by which these other groups might have been absorbed by both the Guarani cultures as well as the primary sources written about them.

Our essay relies on the interdisciplinary academic efforts of a lively community of scholars, whose questions complicated and generated advanced debates on indigenous studies and profoundly impacted generations of scholars on the Americas. To that end, we analyze Father Antonio Ruiz de Montoya’s writings, whose authorship was greatly immersed in the indigenous linguistic and colonial context of the Rio de La Plata region. Ruiz de Montoya was a Jesuit who in seventeenth-century Paraguay translated the indigenous world into the Christian framework for the purpose of converting it. Montoya published the first chronicle—and the only one of its kind—about the first stages of colonial history in the Province of Paraguay.

Montoya was also the author of the *Tesoro de La Lengua Guarani* (1639), the *Catecismo de la Lengua Guarani* (1639), and the *Arte y Bocabulario de la Lengua Guarani* (1640). Additionally, Montoya wrote annual letters concerning the world he was attempting to translate from Guarani to Spanish, a translation that was aimed at modifying its core values and traditions through missionary work. In that process was born a rich body of literature that, once read closely and critically, allows for “thick” scholarship on indigenous ethnographies in late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century Paraguay. While other scholars have analyzed seemingly incontestable sources such as Montoya’s writings, studies about them have been surprisingly few in number,
and even less of them have done so for an English-speaking audience. Accordingly, we hope to shed light on new perspectives and approaches to the Indo-Hispano borderlands through the descriptions authored by missionaries, whose praxis deeply intersected with the language and cultures of these communities.

**Indigenous Ethnographies in Antonio Ruiz De Montoya’s Writings**

The records left by the Jesuits about indigenous communities in colonial Paraguay are highly regarded for their ethnographic value. All kinds of materials—from reports to annual letters, ranging in date from 1594 to 1639—have become main sources for Paraguayan and Guarani studies, due to the overwhelming cultural-informative data offered by this first stage of missionary-indigenous relations. Of special interest are Ruiz de Montoya’s writings, especially due to the breadth provided by his missionary lens, which sought primarily to know and to communicate with the communities in order to convert them to Christianity. Montoya’s annual letters are not only very relevant to the cultural studies of indigenous groups in colonial Paraguay, but also crucial to understanding the historical process that retained aspects of the ethnic identities of the groups, as well as particular characteristics of the “Guarani way of being.”

Although Paraguay’s history is often linked to the Jesuits, its first missionaries were Franciscans who started their work in 1580. Indeed, the Franciscans’ work was decisive for the appreciation and understanding of the importance of missionizing the indigenous communities by valuing their native language. Works by linguists suggest the influential impact of Fray Luis Bolaños, who was the first to preach catechism in an indigenous language among the local communities living in the surrounding areas of Asunción. Almost 30 years after the Franciscans’ first missions, the Spanish crown brought the Jesuits into the Province of Paraguay to “reduce” the indigenous groups to live in villages in order to closely learn how to work and live by the word of God.

Around the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century, Jesuits and Franciscans in the South American borderlands published works on indigenous languages to facilitate missionary work in the Americas. In 1610, Jesuits of Paraguay received the *Arte de Grammatica da Língua mais visada na costa Brasil* (1595), written by the Portuguese Jesuit José de Anchieta and published by Antonio de Mariz in 1595 in Coimbra, Portugal. Padre Anchieta’s grammar on the “universal tupi” was used as an instrument of conversion in the Brazilian coast of Bahia in Portuguese America. When Anchieta’s book reached Paraguay, the missionaries had already been oriented and were working toward the same approach through the unpublished body of work on grammatical notes initiated by Fray Luis Bolaños in the 1580s.

Scholarship on the missions of Paraguay often attributes their successes to the alignment of Guarani culture as amenable to the values of Christianity, or even to the peoples’ natural inclination to docility. Yet, Antonio Ruiz de Montoya’s role in the missionizing project reveals rhetoric that, in addition to advocating for the protection of the indigenous communities in the missions from the Portuguese *bandeirantes* and the labor abuses of the Spanish crown, also petitioned to arm the Indians with firearms. In 1639, Montoya traveled to Spain to request arms from the crown that might be used for liberation. While there, he was able to publish some of his most important works on the indigenous language and his chronicles. Montoya’s petition is dated a year later, in 1640, in which he argued for arming the mission Indians against the Portuguese invaders who sought to capture them in order to take them to São Paulo and sell them as labor for Brazil’s sugar mills. In 1644, Montoya was granted the right to use firearms among the indigenous communities.

Montoya played a key role in the missionary politics of the colonial borderlands of Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina. He denounced abuses toward the mission groups of indigenous people,
published major linguistic works to assist in the progress of missionary work in South America, served as an intermediary in political conversations and debates with the Portuguese bandeirantes and Spaniards, and left a rich body of work of key relevance for the study of indigenous groups. Ruiz de Montoya acted as the superior of the Missions of Guairá and, as such, led the difficult and necessary task of transferring the missions from the Guairá to the south of Paraguay with around 12,000 Guarani. He also had an important role as a translator of the Guaraní and Spanish languages, as well as of catechisms, publishing remarkable works on these topics. Because his intellectual work transcends disciplinary boundaries, Montoya’s writings are of major importance to the field of indigenous studies.

**Anthropology, Polygamy, and Cacique Politics in Ruiz De Montoya’s Cartas**

Montoya’s writings are a rich source of information that makes important distinctions between different indigenous groups in colonial Paraguay, thus providing more complex understandings of their ethnic diversity. For instance, when Ruiz de Montoya referred to the Gualachos Indians in San Xavier in 1628, he revealed aspects about anthropophagy while explaining other features about the traditional customs of this group: “The wildness of this people in killing and eating each other is incredible. At first they do it to avenge their enemies, but after enjoying the taste of human flesh,” concludes Montoya, “they do it for pleasure.” Montoya went on to explain the circumstances grounding his concerns. The padres were dealing with 40 congregated Indians, one of whom apparently had eaten 20 people, including the two sons of an Indian who accompanied the priest.

As the narrative continued to explain how the priests learned of the story, more interesting aspects of mission life came to light, demonstrating the balancing of power and how priests tried to come to terms with leadership. Montoya explained that the padres learned about the case due to the noteworthy frequency with which the Amerindians used to stand in front of the priests’ house. Curious about the cause of this, the priest asked what the Indians were doing there, to which he obtained no response. One day a couple of women arrived in emotional torment, one of them explaining that she was mourning the death of her husband. The indigenous woman said she had been accompanying her husband, who was hunting to sustain their children, and when he climbed a tree to wait for his prey, some Amerindians from that land passed by and struck him with arrows. Although the hunter had begged for his life to sustain his children, the “wild” group overpowered him, and “they roasted his body to eat him.” Following this woman’s declaration, the mission Amerindians who were guarding the priests’ house declared they would leave. The padre then learned that the Amerindians were trying to protect the priests’ house because the cannibal indigenous men wanted to kill and eat the padre. The mission Amerindians asked permission to engage in war in order to destroy the cannibals, but the priest persuaded them to give up on this idea, and, instead, sent out some Amerindians on a peaceful mission. They were to bring the cannibals to the mission with intents of “reducing” them at the village, believing that this would make them renounce such old habits of eating human flesh.

The priests understood the powerful role of these leadership figures in spiritual life, and the role they played in the political structure of these communities. These understandings led the priests to persuade such leaders to ally with the missionary project in order to further gather candidates for conversion. At these borderlands, missionaries negotiated in political, religious, and cultural realms in the name of the missionary precepts knowing that, for instance, some of the Amerindians continued to engage in warfare amongst themselves, sometimes conspiring against the priests as well—such as when they entered the land for the first time and the Amerindians wanted to eat them.
The priests' understandings of the caciques' roles led to missionary intervention in political matters, so that they might become central to these social relations. Montoya describes the first Indian they saw in the bushes surrounding the San Xavier reduction at the time of the Jesuits' first entry, a cacique who was highly esteemed among the group for his "bravery and even for having a sorcerer's name." The cacique was the leader of around nine squares on this site. On that occasion, the cacique convened his Indians to kill the Jesuits, assuring he himself would be the first one to surrender to the missionaries. Although the cacique's plan did not succeed, Montoya suspected that the chief was only observing what the priests were doing, and learning from it while secretly planning another attack.28

Indeed, the cacique punished some of his vassals for having been baptized by the missionaries by stealing their belongings from their houses. Padre Francisco Diaz made the cacique return all the stolen items to the Indians, at which point the cacique invited the leading figures from the village to share his disgust for the priests. He claimed that he would never become a Christian, nor would he go to church. Montoya writes that, “when the church bell plays, he would hunt and kill deer, and that he would eat meat on Fridays,” in order to contradict what the padres demanded of the baptized. Montoya added that for every Sunday mass, there was a line of Indians behind him to hunt, and the deer hunted were actually divided amongst the entire village on Fridays. Typically, it would be expected that the hunters and the chief would divide the hunt among the people.

When Padre Francisco Diaz rebuked the caciques, the leader threatened the priest by showing his bow and arc and targeting the small livestock in front of the entire village. Right after that, the cacique suffered an injury from a tree branch that fell on his head. Yet, even worse than that, “at that same day, four of his concubines fell ill.” Three died that day, and the fourth died on the following day. Montoya explains that these deaths were God's punishment, and adds that the diseases and the great number of deaths recorded among the Indians in Guairá were in fact a divine response to the rebels’ bad conduct. According to Montoya, after witnessing these deaths, the cacique asked the priest to ask for God's forgiveness, especially after having awakened even sicker one morning. He began proclaiming the goodness of the padres, showing regret for his past, and encouraging his people to listen to the priests. Indeed, the cacique even proposed building his own house at the reduction, which he ended up doing while living with his son in the village. Montoya concludes by affirming the importance of these people's devotion and proceeds with the healers' case, referring to these men as witchdoctors.29

The medical emergencies and diseases that plagued the Paraguayan missions were numerous, and were accompanied by elaborate explanations for their causes and effects, such as the polygamous practices among the Christianized Indians. Montoya devoted much of his 1628 annual letter presenting polygamy as a sin, and the plague as its divine punishment. Montoya mentioned the case of a Christian cacique whose involvement with indigenous infidel women was the cause of an illness that proved fatal, even after the man’s confessions.30 The caciques managed to maintain their sexual encounters with female partners outside of the physical and conceptual boundaries imagined by the Jesuits as a divide between the Christianized/mission Indians and infidels.31

In 1630, the climate of tension and the encroachment by the Portuguese on the border with Spanish America generated numerous changes that directly affected the Jesuit missions of Guairá led by Padre Montoya. Repercussions were felt in the province of Guairá, and responses to the strained relations were addressed by different individuals and in different languages. The letter of August 27, 1630, contained arguments made by both the Jesuits and the indigenous groups, in Spanish and Guarani. The Real Audiencia in the city of La Plata had made royal provision in order to allow the Indians in the Guairá to remain there for two months, and to move to the town of Maracayu, located in the east of Asunción, in times of disease.32 Around
that time, the town of Maracayu had become an important center that attracted harvesters due to the yerba-maté production that the Jesuits and mission Indians had already mastered. Yerba-maté had grown into an important commodity for the colonial economy of Paraguay, and, with it, the town of Maracayu represented a site of Indian labor and exploitation. Of course, the Guarani responses dated 1630 show no interest in a transition to the town at any point. The entire mission of Ignacio de Ypaumbucu Rio del Parana gathered to discuss the royal provisions, and padres Cataldino and Mendiola decided to include the Guarani’s own words to “display the strength” of the indigenous arguments. Their statement showed that the Indians from Guairá felt threatened by the Spaniards who consistently visited the reduction and violently took Indians to the encomiendas in Maracayu. The statement claimed that the colonialists assured that the Spanish king would never know what actually took place with these Indians, who were fighting to not be forgotten by the crown. Additionally, the Indians exposed the fatal conditions met by many indigenous people who went to Maracayu to die without the sacraments, thus using Christian rhetoric to condemn the transferal of the Guairá population and validate their request to stay. Montoya started by confirming the quality of the translation of the Guarani words, and concluded his paragraph not only in agreement with the Indians, but also completely reinforcing their reasoning, advising the Majesty of Spain to refrain from sending the Guairá Indians to their graves in Maracayu.

Indigenous Ways of Being in Conquista Espiritual

Montoya’s chronicle reflected the historical context of the Paraguayan borderland communities: colonists representing the Iberian Peninsula, missionaries from different religious orders, and a multitude of indigenous communities who fled encomenderos and exploitive labor systems taking place in their lands. Montoya spoke explicitly about the impact of colonization on the division of indigenous groups that the European presence provoked. Indeed, there were previous disagreements and misunderstandings between some communities, but the intensity of these had worsened due to the Iberian colonization that began in the sixteenth century. According to Montoya’s chronicle Conquista espiritual, the indigenous communities in colonial Paraguay would have learned to negotiate the stealing and selling of each other’s community members to trade with the encomenderos.

Missionaries in the Paraguayan borderlands also recorded data about what they called the “old rituals” of indigenous communities. In order to replace these habits, the missionaries sought to disseminate descriptions of them amongst themselves, and at times, interpretations of these cultural categories, hoping to replace them with Christian ones. In the Spiritual Conquest, Montoya dedicates one chapter to the old beliefs and rituals that are especially relevant because they are related to indigenous ways of being, and to the social identity of being Guarani.

According to Melià, the way of being Guarani is closely linked to how “the Indians lived their geographical space.” Thus, the so-called tekoha Guarani relates to its geography, it means “where we live according to our customs.” Therefore, the cultural category tekoha means the “place of the way of life, culture, teko means and produce at the same time the economic relations, social relations and political-religious organization both essential for the Guarani life.” Melià further explains that the very category of spatiality is “crucial to the Guarani culture,” because “it ensures the freedom and the possibility of maintaining ethnic identity.” Once “reduced” to Jesuit space, the Guarani lived in a new form of spatial (and therefore social) organization.

This identity management could manifest itself in several ways, including in the mobility of this group. Such mobility is often related and referred to by scholars through the theme of the
although this obscured the fact that the Guarani were walkers rather than nomadic peoples. Either to visit friends and relatives, or to indeed search for this land, the Guarani’s constant mobility was part of a way of living, thus the reductions led by the Jesuits would indeed represent simply another place for the communities. The Guarani walked in search of a land that would offer an abundance of natural resources both physically and metaphysically, such as in dreams.

While for the missionaries the reductions were spaces for the Guarani to live under “the priests diligence to larger villages, and to the political and human life,” wearing “cotton to dress them since the Indians generally lived naked,” and being in constant vigil, it was also a place where their search could be carried on, and their way of being might continue to be lived. Although there are other aspects of this way of being, we will focus on the themes of shamanism; land, fields, and hills; agriculture; hunting, fishing, and recollection; polygamous relations; and leadership.

The missionaries learned a great deal about American nature, fauna, and geography through their attention to indigenous perspectives. More importantly, the Jesuits also learned about the relations of those communities with their natural, animal, and, ultimately religious world. A close analysis of the sources supports the notion of indigenous perspectives immersed within the Jesuits’ words, especially when descriptions of animals and plots are cross-referenced with ethnographic data about the myths of these groups. While the records vary on aspects of nature, such as animals, depending on the dialogical experiences between the individual authors and the indigenous groups, we will focus on Montoya’s narratives involving animals like snakes, jaguars, and tapirs. These animals appear constantly in the records of other missionaries as well, and are often at the center of religious and mythic texts.

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The natural world appears to intersect with religion through practices of medicine, rites of healing, and hunting. Montoya’s descriptions showed more complex understandings of these practices in colonial Paraguay, and allow us to see how nature was understood both in terms of scientific as well as magical terms, inside and outside of the limits of the reductions. Missionaries made numerous references to vipers and the indigenous ways of treating their poisoned bite, including Montoya. Indigenous groups tended to use a range of natural ingredients and medicinal herbs (such as the São Paulo rock), and prepared a drink from smashed garlic. But of special interest was fire, which was regarded as the most important of medicines. It was used by the Amerindians to burn the bitten part of a wound, which would then be sprayed with sulfur. If done in time, this rite would likely save the victims’ lives.

While missionaries might have encouraged hunting in order to sustain the indigenous population, it was actually condemned for its ambiguous religious relation to indigenous cultures. Indeed, the many references to hunting in the Jesuits’ manuscripts and writings were made to condemn these practices, given their cultural relevance among the indigenous communities in the Río de La Plata basin. After all, similar to the indigenous world, the animal world had a hierarchic representation in which equivalent social actors form the “socialization of the nature,” with its “leaders, sorcerers, warriors, hunters, etc.” Thus, hunting among the colonial Paraguayan Indians had a socioreligious structure that permeated the relationships between humans and animals. Those narratives captured religious components related to hunting as a sacred activity, while simultaneously recording the indigenous people’s knowledge about their environment and strategies formed in response to it. Thus, empirical and magical knowledge were present, and Montoya witnessed and chose to record the cultural institution of hunting.

Montoya described a water snake that was trying to kill an indigenous man, who, in turn, ended up hunting the snake. The story unfolds as the snake prepares to attack the man, who immediately “raises his arms.” The snake, in turn, curls up his body. Using a knife hidden behind
his back, he attacked the animal. After killing the snake, Montoya reports that the man fed himself from it for days. The anecdote referred to the Indians’ skillful ways of responding to these circumstances, but also addressed indigenous understandings of how to relate to the natural world.

Jaguars were often the main characters in episodes involving spiritual and political leadership. The priests seem particularly interested in knowing more about these creatures and their connections to indigenous communities due to their constant appearances in the everyday lives of these peoples. Montoya recalled what the priests learned about them from the indigenous groups, as well as how they referred to jaguars. In the Vocabulario, he clarified meanings for the Guaraní word jaguarete: the once divided jagua and ete together refer to “really hideous creature,” stressing the idea that any encounter with this animal is dramatic and evil. In his chronicle, he narrated a case that indicates that from a Guaraní perspective, although the jaguars were endowed with force, they do not have the wisdom of the human, and therefore can be outwitted. One case demonstrated that human urine may be used to scare jaguars away. Montoya mentioned another time that an indigenous man, stalked by a jaguar, was able to get up in a tree. The man tried many strategies to scare the jaguar away, including throwing rocks and sticks, yet the only thing that kept the jaguar away was his urine.

Jaguars also appeared in indigenous beliefs and explanations of natural phenomena such as eclipses. These animals apparently caused mixed feelings because their attitudes were unpredictable—they can be both bad and good. According to Montoya, the Amerindians explained that eclipses were caused by “a giant tiger or dog [who] lives in the sky, and in certain instances of rage, such animal devours the moon and the sun.” The Indians’ reactions to these phenomena showed both “apprehension and admiration.” Jaguars clearly occupied a prominent place in indigenous culture—in the natural, spiritual, and religious realms.

In ways similar to the jaguars, tapirs often populated narratives about indigenous peoples, revealing some of the strategies involved in hunting them and the cultural relation with these animals. Montoya narrated how Amerindian hunters would approach a corral of tapirs during the evening, use fire to outshine them at night, and hunt them easily when the morning came. In terms of meat, Montoya drew a comparison between tapirs’ meat and cows’ meat, which led to the understanding that the Jesuits also enjoyed the hunted animals captured by the Indians—an especially interesting fact considering that missionaries tended to discourage hunting. Another note made by Montoya refers to the tapirs’ nails, which were believed to hold poison.

Of course, many of these references were categorized by Jesuit logic as mere superstitions. However, these narratives revealed deep cultural aspects of indigenous cultures, since the animal world reflected the social structure of Guaraní society. For instance, with a description of the presence of a deer in a village, Montoya remarked that this animal “not being killed, someone from the village where the animal passed by, shall die.” While retelling this case from “experimental observation” Montoya attested that the devil supports such false beliefs, since he witnessed the same occurring while a wedding celebration was taking place in a Spanish town, where, sure enough, the groom died after a deer’s visit and unsuccessful attempts to kill it. Such cases, when taken together, offered an explanation about the order of the supernatural world among indigenous groups, which dictated certain rules and expectations for relations between animals and humans.

Indigenous resistance in the Rio de La Plata basin manifested itself in various ways and demonstrated distinct levels of engagement, regardless of community, region, or the scope of these responses. In the first decades of the missionary presence in colonial Paraguay, there are records of at least 25 spiritual leaders who challenged the missionaries. These leaders were often referred to by the priests as wizards, sorcerers, magicians, and by some scholars as shamans because of their roles as healers. Many references to sorcery were linked to animals, with sorcerers being
the interpreters of birds’ singing. As for the descriptions of medicine men, Montoya alluded to the “sucking of the wounds,” followed by the removal of objects—these could be fish spine and coal—from the sorcerer’s mouth, suggesting that these were the reasons for the illness. Among the categories of sorcerers, there were those referred to as “gravediggers,” because they bury “food, fruit peels, and coal,” and sometimes “frogs crossed with fishbones” in the house of those whom they are targeting to kill, causing the victim to weaken to death. The sorcerers also handled the local plants and already were aware of the yerba before most Indians and the colonialists were. Montoya (1639, 45) investigated the origin of the yerba “among 80 to 100 Indians” to find out that “when these old Indians were young, this yerba wasn’t to drink. The Indians knew of it only through the sorcerer or magician, who had a deal with the devil.” Montoya concluded by affirming that the yerba was widely used to “do spells.”

When trying to identify the meanings of the terms held by the spiritual leaders for the members of the indigenous groups, Montoya also found meanings for the Jesuits in their linguistic terms. For instance, the Indians in the Tayati called the priests “Pay Abaré,” which according to Montoya (98) meant they were different from others, because they were “chaste men.” Montoya explains that “Pay” was used to refer to the spiritual leaders often categorized by the missionaries as sorcerers and wizards, as already discussed. Montoya offered a definition of a Guarini term that suggests that the indigenous people thought of priests in the same way as they thought of their own leaders. Even the sorcerers themselves referred to the priest as Abaré due to the priests’ celibacy.

Many names and stories about the spiritual leaders were told, while the cultural categories of war, revenge, and the constant displacement from and return to villages were invoked. Although names such as Taubici, Araguaye, Tayubay, Yeguaporú, Ñesú, and Guirabera were often associated with several religious aspects pertaining to the missionary project, they also revealed relevant data for the understanding of these indigenous communities within these cultural categories. When Montoya referenced his visit to the reduction of San Loreto with Padre Simon Masseta and Padre José Cataldino, he mentioned the “great cacique, besides magician, wizard, and a devil’s relative” named “Taubici.” According to Montoya, Taubici was a very well respected member of his community, “for fearing his cruelty,” the priest was nonetheless very well regarded. He even prevented the priests from being killed when they were visiting the village for the first time. With time, Taubici and his village members came to live in the San Ignácio reduction under the direction of Padre Masseta, and to celebrate “Corpus Christi” day with a party, the cacique decided to leave the reduction with his vassals to return to his village. On the way, enemy Indians attacked them to “avenge an Indian killed by Taubici.” Taubici’s case informs us of the groups’ mobility inside and outside of the mission, the importance of the leadership in deciding where the group should go, and revenge and war among indigenous nations.

Frequently, indigenous ways of being were recorded as referring to a hidden old way of living, which was discovered by the missionaries while the Indians lived within the reduction. On occasions, this old way of living was revealed by the priest through the actions of some of the leaders. A ringleader unnamed by Montoya was among these cases, and his words defined the old way of living as “the ancestors’ way.” According to Montoya’s chronicle, this rebel was disguised as a candidate for Christian conversion, living in a house built by mission Indians but at a distance from the center where the priests themselves were located. It was in this house where the rebel sorcerer performed the old ritual practices, and preached the old ways of living: “Let us live the way of our ancestors! What is the reason for the priests to think is evil for us to have women in abundance?! It’s absurd that we shall abandon our customs and our good way of living of our ancestors, and instead, we subject ourselves to the news that these priests are introducing! The best remedy for this evil is to take this priest’s life.” Through this active
threat to the priest’s life, this unnamed rebel’s case informs us of resistance in the borderlands, which is the very opposite of the commonly held notion of peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, the rebel’s motives trace back to his ancestors’ way of living in the time prior to the Europeans’ arrival. It comes as no surprise that the Jesuits condemned this rebel’s preachings, for not only did he threaten the priest’s life, but he also articulated the revival of the custom of polygamy, a major sin combated by the religious orders.

Although the Indians of the São Francisco Xavier mission present in these accounts responded with “joys and dances,” one young Indian reported the fact to Padre Francisco de Cespedes, who had to escape during the night since sorcerers were hunting him. While many Indians accompanied the priest, others followed the sorcerer. Yet with pressure from armed Christians, the rebels were displaced and set out to different reductions in Paraná. The movement was initiated by an unnamed ringleader, who ended up being sent to the reduction in Loreto.

Other cases provide evidence of hidden ways of being serving to perpetuate indigenous identities at the missions. When Montoya referred to the indigenous groups charmas and yanos living in the same reduction, he mentioned that both were warrior groups, but also that they had no fixed homes and moved constantly. Another problem was faced in the reduction of Concepción de Nuestra Señora, defined by Montoya as a “wizard nest.” In particular, one wizard, explained Montoya, pretended to become a Christian while he in fact remained a “devil’s minister” for years before the priest found out about his disguised acts of defiance. Not too far from that reduction, another similarly disguised wizard lived among the priests in the reduction of Corpus Christi, and was equally rebellious. The persistence of these famous sorcerers and their influence was an ongoing problem for the priests in colonial Paraguay. Missionaries put a lot of effort into combating the impact of these actions, as is shown in records and in Montoya’s chronicle.

Countless life-threatening movements are present in the Jesuits’ writings, representing the complex relationships between the missionaries and Paraguayan indigenous groups. For instance, in the first reduction founded in the Province of Paraguay, called “Santo Ignácio del Parana,” Montoya reported the existence of a group of Indians who were intent on killing priests as well as their supporters. This threat demonstrated that the Indians who were allied with priests were in danger, since the rebels saw them as betrayers. Thus, when the missionaries argued that the colonialists divided these groups, they failed to observe their own share of guilt in this dynamic.

Yet, if on the one hand the groups were threatening each other because of the priests, on the other they also allied against the priests. On some occasions, ultimatums resulted in fatalities for the priests, as was the case of Padre Pedro Espinosa. At the same reduction of Santo Ignácio, a group of rebels allied with another group located in Loreto, and together they killed Padre Espinosa. They claimed to disapprove of Espinosa’s preaching, and accused him of lying and adoring “fake gods,” such as María, Jesus, and God. After disclosing all of this to the priest, the group attacked him and let him be “devoured by the tigers,” which, as already has been discussed, were seen as being truly evil creatures.

Indigenous identities were interpreted by and represented through the focused lenses of the missionary’s intent on religious conversion. Nonetheless, it was precisely the urge to know these communities that triggered the Jesuits’ interest in capturing as much information as possible to identify the markers of indigenous belief in order to target them. In Montoya’s chronicle it is possible to learn about the Guarani rites and sociopolitical organization in small villages governed by their caciques. Missionaries in Paraguay understood the caciques as the nobility among the Guarani, and Montoya even elaborated on this social structure as an inherent status passed through the caciques’ ancestors. Montoya also noted the main characteristics of successful leadership, including their nobility, as shown through their eloquence in speech—part of the importance of their language. As Montoya was the author of the vocabulary and grammar
of the Guaraní language, he demonstrated a skill useful for political and religious purposes in colonial Paraguay.76

Although the benefits and privileges enjoyed by caciques varied, Montoya traced a pattern that helped in understanding the structure of these groups in order to reach their desired Christianity through the actions of the Jesuits.77 The caciques had their houses built by their vassals, but they also planted and harvested the land along with the community. Their vassals would offer their daughters to the caciques should they want additional wives, as polygamy was permitted. As a matter of fact, Montoya revealed that he had news of some caciques who had 15, 20, and even 30 wives. While Montoya referred to polygamy among the caciques, he also concluded that the group as a whole was very respectful of women, especially mothers and sisters, and that they never broke the taboos of fornication with them. Once they became Christians, ensured Montoya, they left their various women, choosing only one to be their principal wife. Of special interest is that they were able to convince the caciques to have only one wife after becoming Christians, which represented a rupture with the old way of life as recalled by the aforementioned rebel chief of Santo Ignácio.

Indigenous women’s worlds were often related to the social and family episodes described and interpreted by Montoya, who focused on the circumstances in which the Jesuits could possibly garner more candidates to the mission. Thus, Montoya also reported that when a woman was about to give birth, the husband and father would abstain from eating for 15 days: “no meat, and no hunting even with the prey right in front of them.” This was believed to protect the child’s health. Once the child was born, Montoya revealed that the Indians had a form of baptism or “special way to name the child.”

Rituals of anthropophagy were recurrent even among natives considered already converted, suggesting the continuing relevance of these cultural practices to the groups. On one occasion, two Indians were killed by infidels who Montoya himself was trying to initiate through conversion rites. Often the missionaries entered for the first time into a “Gentile” village accompanied by converted Indians, seeking to make first contacts. In one case, as soon as the two Indians approached the infidels, they were offered women to “celebrate their baptism ceremonies.” While one Indian engaged in taking wives, the other rejected them and was killed and eaten without ceremony. The Indian who chose his wives and accepted his fate, was “killed with solemnity, and eaten,” showing that the ritual was carried out.78 Montoya provided more details on such practices, informing the reader that the captive had freedom in terms of “food and women, all of his choosing.” When the captive was ready, he was “killed with a lot of solemnity.” Every member of the community touched the dead body, and added that name to their own, which explains the aforementioned “baptism” ritual. In a huge party involving different ceremonies, the Guaraní prepared and cooked some sort of cereal with the body, and every member tastes it, including small children, and a new name was added to theirs.79

Priests often recorded rituals of death and the afterlife in colonial Paraguay. Montoya described that generally the widows would wail and hurl themselves from high places, often injuring themselves or even dying. The burial rituals involved the belief that the soul and the body went separately to the grave; once they brought their dead to the urns, they would also bring along small plates in their mouths to assure the soul would be “better fit.” Even after the Indians were living in the missions as Christians, the persistence of these habits was noted when the priests would bury the dead. There was always a “sly old woman who” would use a small pot and in a “disguised manner would agitate that pot as if she was taking something from the grave.” The Indians would say that that something was the soul.80

Although priests also put a lot of effort into preaching against the sin of adultery, and for the maintenance of chastity, the habit of keeping more than one wife and/or having sexual encounters
with different partners persisted. In order to minimize losses of potential Christians, priests had to be flexible on this matter, and ended up making exceptions—especially to caciques—since so many Indians were losing interest in conversion. Montoya’s chronicle reveals that the priests avoided for two years any mention of the sixth commandment while they preached twice a day and at Sunday masses. Montoya even revealed that the caciques had offered the priests some women, since it was believed to be “against the nature if men to do the domestic work,” like the missionaries did.

This was also true of caciques Roque Macaranan and Miguel Artiguaye, who lived in one of the colonies near Santo Ignácio. Maracanan was widely respected by his community and well known by the surrounding groups due to his “great eloquence,” another relevant characteristic necessary to be a leader among the Guarani, reveals Montoya. With respect to his marital status, Montoya recorded that Maracanan replaced his legitimate noble wife with another woman. Maracanan also performed the functions of a missionary priest: dressing up with “a feather cape,” and preaching mass with “towels on a table, and … a cassava pie, a vase decorated, and corn wine.” Maracanan would then perform as the priests he saw did by speaking to his vassals, performing ceremonies, eating and drinking that food, and being revered by faithful followers. Having observed the priests, Maracanan recreated his role within his community based on the detailed understanding he had of the priests’ world.

Maracanan reinvented both the sacred host and wine by replacing it with cassava pie and corn wine, respectively. Maracanan maintained concubines—encouraging others to do the same—and was against the consecrated water used by priests to heal the ill. According to Montoya, Maracanan used to preach that the priests were actually brought by the “demons” since they were introducing “their new beliefs, [to] deprive us of the old and good way of living of our ancestors.” Maracanan reminded his fellow Indians of their history and their ancestors who not only “had many women,” but also “many domestic helpers,” as well as the “freedom to choose whomsoever they wanted,” whereas with the coming of the priests the Indians had “to be with only one woman.” The cacique found this to be “unfair,” and thus threatened directly the priests: “we either send them away from our lands, or you take their lives away.” Cacique Maracanan was fighting to maintain this very specific habit of polygamy.

Miguel Artiguaye’s conclusions regarding the priests and their teachings were similar; when he first met the priests he engaged in a calm dialogue. But the importance of polygamy for indigenous communities was so great that it seemed non-negotiable. Artiguaye first accused the priests of being “hell demons, sent by your prince to our doom,” then proceed to make remarks about the old way of being of the Indians and their ancestors: “Our greatest lived freely, and having the women they wanted, without anyone bothering them, with whom they lived and spent their days with joy. You, however, want to destroy their traditions and impose on us such a heavy load, that is of tie-in with one woman.” On his way out, Artiguaye remarked that although the priests were freely living in the indigenous lands, he would not endure to live under the missionaries’ “bad way of being.” Through these interactions recorded by Montoya, we learn that polygamy was a fundamental and nonnegotiable aspect of the Guarani way of being.

One day the mission was awakened by the sound of “drums, flutes, and other instruments,” and about 300 well adorned Indians armed with arrows and bows led by Artiguaye gathered in the central plaza. Montoya, Padre Simon, and Padre José already suspected that the group was on its way to ask permission from Roque Maracanan to kill the missionaries, and as soon as Artiguaye arrived in San Loreto he clarified once again his intention to no longer suffer at the priests’ hands: “they put us in a house – that they call church – and in there they talk and do the opposite of what our ancestors did. They had many women, and these priests take them away from us, and they want us to keep just one.”
Cacique Maracanan came out to see Artiguaye, who once more emphasized “it is time to honor our ancestors and put an end to these priests, to enjoy our women and our freedom.” Although Macaranan had threatened the priests before, he aggressively rejected Artiguaye’s suggestion, pushing him down to the ground, and threatening him with punishment. Perhaps because he had known that another cacique, Arará, had offered help and to protect the priests should Artiguaye try to kill them, Maracanan canceled the plan altogether. Miguel Artiguaye returned to the mission of Loreto, and asked for the priests’ forgiveness, despite, as later described, never having left his mistress. The priests ended up relocating the mistress to a faraway town, but Miguel was able to trace her, and left his wife and village members behind to pursue a life with his mistress. He moved with her small child to a distant wood, where he worked for years and died, leaving her without any option but to go back to the missions to be supported by the priests.

Cacique Maracanan was one of many examples of indigenous chiefs who would manage their alliances flexibly. Although Cacique Maracanan at first threatened the Jesuits, he then allied with the missionaries, and prevented them from being attacked. Yet, not too long after that, the same cacique would be reported as uniting forces with another cacique and a spiritual leader in order to expel the missionaries from indigenous lands. Although this plan was also unsuccessful and the three conspirators ended up dying in the attempt, Maracanan’s case pointed to the strategic relationships within and between communities that the chiefs acted upon, sometimes in favor of and sometimes against the Jesuits.

It is important to point out that Artiguaye’s call for a return to the traditions of their ancestors, including polygamy, was quoted three times in Montoya’s chronicle, suggesting its relevance and charged meaning for the Guarani. In both cases, Artiguaye and Maracanan articulated a discourse that denied the imposition of the new way of life brought by the missionaries in favor of maintaining the old traditions, particularly the habit of polygamy. More cases of caciques who openly or secretly maintained their polygamous family lives populate Montoya’s chronicle and missionaries letters, some accepting Christian teaching only to seek out their concubines right after, while others would turn in some of their wives, while in fact having “left thirty concubines hidden.”

Antonio Ruiz de Montoya’s reasoning supports the notion that all the difficulties the missionaries experienced among the indigenous communities were direct consequences of bad role models and the attitudes of the Spanish colonialists, to whom the Indians only mattered in terms of the labor system. Montoya explicitly blamed the Spaniards’ mistreatment of the Indians as the main cause for the remaining existence of the old practices among the converted Indians. He affirmed that the colonialists were bad role models, and that this is the main reason for a lack of interest in the evangelical teachings brought by the Jesuits. Montoya definitively denounced the atrocities caused by the labor systems taking place in Paraguay, targeting the disclosure of the Indians’ mistreatment at the encomiendas, and providing a full description of what was done with the yerba, and how the encomenderos abused this Indian labor system in colonial Paraguay. Indeed as the chronicle was to be published in Madrid, Montoya was petitioning to arm the indigenous against the Spanish encomenderos and Portuguese Bandeirantes.

As the colonial Spanish American world drew to its end, another key figure emerged to reach across the northern and southern borderlands and provide a sense of historical change and some closure to the complex entanglements of these regions of Indo-Hispano negotiation. Teodoro de Croix, a Frenchman who, by virtue of diplomatic alliances between the Catholic royalty of France and Spain, came to be appointed the first commandant general of the newly designed Provincias Internas del Norte in 1776. His charge reflected the changing nature of frontier relations...
that had unfolded between the 1540s and the later years of the eighteenth century. Where once administrators like Cabeza de Vaca were expected to protect vulnerable Indian peoples from exploitation by encomenderos, borderlands north and south had evolved toward striking military parity. The relatively defenseless hunters and gatherers or swidden farmers of the sixteenth century had, in some cases, become themselves transformed from the Spanish notion of salvages (simple savages) to that of bárbaros, peoples with real military power who might threaten Spanish control of the borderlands.94

Among the most threatening of indios bárbaros in the northern provinces were the various divisions of the Comanches, numic-speaking peoples who had emerged from their mobile hunter-gathering lives in the Great Basin of North America in the early eighteenth century to adopt an equestrian hunting and raiding economy, fully formed and fiercely effective by the 1770s. From the 1740s onwards, Comanche raiding plagued Spanish colonial missions and settlements in New Mexico and the province of Tejas, severely limiting provincial exchange and communications with Mexico. Among Croix’s instructions from King Carlos V was to reorganize the presidial defenses of the frontier, but also, more importantly, to employ a combination of military action and diplomacy to bring the Comanches into treaty relationships with Spain. By February 1786, he and his lieutenant Juan Bautista de Anza had achieved that objective with a treaty executed in Santa Fe, New Mexico, complete with the exchange of hostages to ensure mutual compliance.95

But de Croix was not in Mexico City to enjoy the success in diplomacy. In 1781, a revolt among the Quechans of the lower Colorado River region in the province of Sonora pulled his attention westward from Comanche affairs. De Croix held himself responsible, for in addition to the Franciscan missions of La Purisima Concepcion and San Pedro y San Pablo in Quechan country, he encouraged the establishment of two secular pueblos among those whom the padres sought to evangelize. Hosting missionaries whom they supported with their own produce, in exchange for military defense against Halchidhoma raiders, was one thing; but seeing their fields trampled by grazing sheep, cattle, and horses proved to be quite another. By July 1781, tensions erupted, and within one week 105 Spanish pobladores died, including 21 women and children. Seventy-six settlers were taken war captive. So too did the two Franciscan priests, who had been warmly welcomed, only to find their mission hopelessly compromised by the addition of the pobladores. Punishments ensued, but de Croix was no longer calling the orders. He had been abruptly summoned to take up the duties of the Viceroy of Peru, charged to restore order in the aftermath of the uprising of the second Tupac Amaru.96

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In the summer of 1770, eight-year-old Francisco Xavier Chaves drove his family’s sheep to graze on the expanse of dry grasslands running up toward the Manzano Mountains from the Chaves’ family home village of Tomé, in New Spain’s northernmost province of New Mexico. Tomé was a frontier settlement, established in 1739 to provide rest, sustenance, and protection from Indian raids to travelers on El Camino Real, the royal road that linked the distant provincial capital of Santa Fe to cities far to the south—El Paso del Norte, cuidad Chihuahua, Durango, and finally Mexico City itself. Its settlers included some 172 indios genizanos (a unique caste of converted and hispanicized Indian slaves, the males among whom were raised and trained to act as frontier soldiers), as well as vecinos (Spanish colonial citizens) who sought new irrigable and grazable lands a day’s ride south of Albuquerque. By 1760 it contained some 400 residents who carried forward the mixed ethnic character of the original pobladores (settlers).97

As young Francisco drove his sheep toward the forested mountains, a raiding band of Comanches swept both the boy and his livestock up and carried them across the steep passes to
their vast homelands on the southern plains. He would grow to adulthood among his captors, but when his adoptive Comanche mother died, depriving him of the protections of captive kinship, he was sold to Taovayas, village farmers along the Red River who were often allies of the Comanches. In 1784, at the age of 22, he slipped away from his captors and presented himself to Governor Domingo Cabello at San Antonio de Bexar. Eyelids tattooed in the Taovayas’ fashion, he then began a long career as cultural emissary in the service of Spain.

Along with a compatriot, the Frenchman-turned-Indian Pedro Vial, Francisco would participate in the earliest Euro-American trailblazing expeditions between Tejas and New Mexico in the 1780s and 1790s. Chaves also managed to reclaim kin and cultural ties with the Comanches, for as late as 1792 Vial encountered him on the Plains east of Pecos, traveling with seven Comanches and their wives. He had spent the last three years among his Comanche kinspeople, and now, Chaves told Vial, they were heading for New Mexico in order to visit his parents. In a final example of Indo–Hispano entanglement, Chaves had found ways to connect the violence of the borderlands to the flexible filaments of kinship among his captors and kinsmen with those of the blood relatives he had left behind more than 20 years before. His life, and those of the many enmeshed in borderlands north and south, illustrate the myriad social worlds that developed in these regions, their fluidity, and their fragility once the era of independence and state building would commence in the nineteenth century.98

Notes

1 The literature on Cabeza de Vaca’s journey and life is extensive; the most recent and comprehensive from Andrés Reséndez, A Land So Strange: The Epic Journey of Cabeza de Vaca (New York: Basic Books, 2007; for a recent translation of his own account, see Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, The Narrative of Cabeza De Vaca, Translation of La Relación, eds. Rolena Adorno and Patrick Charles Pautz, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).


5 Julia Sarreal (The Guarani and Their Missions, 2014, 9) affirms that even in the post-Jesuit years Guarani leaders acting as cabildos kept exchanging letters and correspondence in Guarani, avoiding performing their work in Spanish.


7 Missionary–indigenous relations in colonial Paraguay were, therefore a result of the interplay of these heterogeneous groups. As Mary Louise Pratt argues, it is also engendered by an asymmetry in its nature due to variables such as the imperial administration as well as the agendas placed in the hands of the missionaries, who authored the sources (Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation [London: Routledge, 1992]).

8 Bartomeu Meliá (El Guarani Conquistado Y Reducido: Ensayos De Etnohistoria [Asunción: Centro De Estudios Antropológicos, Universidad Católica, 1986]) already called attention to this phenomenon in his early groundbreaking essays published in Paraguay. Influenced by Meliá’s work of linguistic anthro-
pology, a young group of scholars dedicated years of work to compiling data from primary sources derived in the first century of missions, and collectively published it in 2003 as a database in CD form entitled *Xamanismo e Cura na Coleção De Angelis*, with easy access and querying. This project was funded by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) Foundation, and the research group was composed by Dr. Maria Cristina dos Santos (Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul [PUCRS]), and research associates Dr. Jean Baptista (Universidade Federal de Goiás), Dr. Bianca Brigidi (Quest University Canada), Dr. Fabiana Pires, and Dr. Caíla Berto.

9 In addition to the well-known works by Melià (1997) and Alvarez Kern (2009), which point to the ethnic diversity of the La Plata region, there are the works authored by Santos and Baptista, and Wilde: Santos, Maria Cristina dos and Jean Baptista, “Reduções Jesuíticas e Povoados de Índios: Controvérsias Sobre a População Indígena (séc XVII–XVIII),” *Historia* Vol. 11, No. 2 (2007), and Guillermo Wilde, “Territorio y Etnogénesis Misional en el Paraguay del siglo XVIII,” *Revista Fronteiras*, Dourados, Vol. 11, No. 19 (2009).

10 Jean Baptista. “A visibilidade étnica nos registros coloniais: missões Guarani ou Missões Indígenas?” *Povos Indígenas: coleção História Geral do Rio Grande do Sul*, 1 ed., (Passo Fundo: Meritos, 2009), Vol. 5, 207. Additionally, cases such as in the reduction of Nuestra Señora de los Reyes is described by Montoya (1639, 211, conquista) as composed by a diversity of indigenous groups and languages, in which everyone could “understand the common language, that is Guarani.” Since the early years of the Spanish and Portuguese conquest, missionaries demonstrated interest in indigenous languages. These works can be found in Matthew Restall, Lisa Sousa, and Kevin Terraciano, *Mesoamerican Voices: Native Language From Colonial Mexico, Oaxaca, Yucatan, and Guatemala* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

11 Recent indigenous studies are numerous, and they help to illuminate more inclusive approaches to history and cultural studies about indigenous communities. Frameworks such as “reversed colonialism” (Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*. [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008]), “contact zones” (Mary Louise Pratt, gender dynamics and the role of women within the Spanish Missions [Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* [Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007]), and the “middle ground” (Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991]), are just a few examples of critical works on the indigenous communities in the colonial Americas. More provocative frameworks on indigenous studies, such as Linda Tuhiwai-Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999) invite us to rethink and reconsider the whole approach to research and its narrow views on non-Western cultures.

On the same line of thinking, works by the Mohawk scholar Gerald Taiaiake Alfred (*Wâsci: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* [Peterborough, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2005]) shifted the paradigm by centralizing the analysis on indigenous identities in a contemporary context as transcendental of the negative asymmetrical relations engendered by current states (to coin the important framework brought by Hector Diaz Polanco in *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America: The Quest for Self-determination*. Translated by Lucia Rayas [Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997]).

12 Scholarship on the ethnographic state often considers the Jesuits’ writings solely for their goal of serving the imperial administration, therefore, classifying the indigenous communities while conditioned by the need to produce a binary discourse opposing “Christian Indians” and “infidel Indians” (Guillermo Wilde, “De las crónicas jesuíticas a las ‘etnografías estatales’: realidades y ficciones del orden misional en las fronteras ibéricas,” *Nuevo Mundo Mundo Nuevos* [En ligne], Débats, mis en ligne le 30 novembre 2011, consulté le 27 septembre 2015. Available online at http://nuevomundo.revues.org/62238; DOI : 10.4000/nuevomundo.62238).

13 Although the list of works is immensely long, note the works authored by Bartomeu Melià and Graciela Chamorro (*Decir el Cuerpo: Historia y Etnografía del Cuerpo de los Pueblos Guarani*. [Asunción: Tiempo de Historia, 2009]).
Meliá (El modo de ser, conquistado y reducido) established these dates to reflect the letter by Father Alonso Barzana a Juan Sebastián of 1594 published in Guillermo Furlong (1968), and the Spiritual Conquest by Father Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, published in 1639.


According to Meliá, the reducción “conducted by the Jesuits among the Guarani was a religious enterprise as well as a sociocultural achievement that played fully into the structure of the Guarani nation.” Bartomeu Meliá, *El Guarani-conquistado y reducido: ensayos de etnohistoria* (Asunción: Centro de Estudios Antropológicos, Universidad Católica, 1986), 5.

Available at www.brasiliana.usp.br/bbd/handle/1918/000592000#page/1/mode/1up.

According to Meliá (*La Lengua Guarani*, 42), from 1582–1585, Fray Bolaños had assistance from two “criollos” missionaries born in Paraguay and raised with the Guarani language as their mother tongue. Meliá (2012, 2) also mentions the encounter between Ruiz de Montoya and Father Diego González Holguín, who authored the *Gramática y arte nueva de la lengua general de todo el Perú*, llamada lengua Quichua, o lengua del Inca (1607) and *Vocabulario de la lengua general de todo el Perú*, llamada lengua Quichúa o del Inca (1608).

These ideas can be found in a variety of sources, such as in the works cited by Sarreal (*The Guarani and Their Missions*).

For more on the bandeirantes, see John M. Monteiro, *Negros Da Terra: Índios E Bandeirantes Nas Origens De São Paulo* (São Paulo: Companhia Das Letras, 1994).


“Copia de la Petición del Pe. Antonio Ruiz de Montoya hecha a S. M, suplicando por el remedio de las Prov...” and *Reducciones de Indios en las hostilidades que padece (sic) de los Portugueses* (MCA, Cortesão, Guairá), 433–4.


1628. *Carta Anua dei Guayra por el Pe. Antonio Ruiz, del año de 628.* (MCA, Cortesão, Guairá), 263.

1628. *Carta Anua dei Guayra por el Pe.* 264.

Sarreal 2014, 37.

Reduction of San Xavier, 1628. *Carta Anua del Guayra por el Pe. Antonio Ruiz, del año de 628* (MCA, Cortesão, Guairá), 264.

Reduction of San Xavier, 264.

Reduction of San Xavier, 264–6. Jesuits often represented diseases as divine opportunities to convert more Amerindians. There are innumerable references to the health of mothers giving birth and to newborns, since the Jesuits would have a particular interest in baptizing the infants, such as in San Xavier’s account from 1628 in which Montoya refers to a woman’s labor in which the father searched for the priest’s help in “saying the gospel.” Two hours later, the padre assured, a young healthy infant was nursing (Reduction of San Xavier, 266).

1628. *Carta Anua del Guayra por el Pe. Antonio Ruiz, del año de 628* (MCA, Cortesão, Guairá), 267.


1628. *Carta Anua del Guayra por el Pe.* 352.

1628. *Carta Anua del Guayra por el Pe.* 355.

1628. *Carta Anua del Guayra por el Pe.* 357.

Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, *Conquista espiritual hecha por los religiosos de la Compañía de Jesús en las provincias del Paraguay, Paraná, Uruguay y Tape* (Madrid, 1639) (Bilbao: Corazón de Jesús, 1892), 40.

Montoya, *Conquista espiritual*, 221.


Although this notion is widely known, it does not apply to all Guarani groups. In fact it is denied by the Mbýá, for instance (Interview with Meliá, “A historia de um guarani é a história de suas palavras”).


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45 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 35.
46 Jean Baptista (2004, 70) demonstrated that among the Paraguayan populations, the natural world is conceived of as the very “means to exist, from where the myths are collected, the rules, and institutions are formed, and the pathways of life are walked.”
47 Although Viveiros de Castro analyzes the Amazonian groups, there are plenty of references in his article to other works of ethnohistories—Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “Cosmological Deities and Amerindian Perspectivism.” The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 4, 3 (September 1998), 469–488.
48 Let’s not forget the value of cross-referencing sources to look at indigenous history since Harris’ groundbreaking work on indigenous perspectives about the theme of the “discovery/arrival” of Spaniards in the Americas (“The Coming of the White People.” Reflections on the Mythologisation of History in Latin America”).
49 Besides the Nimuendajú’s texts published in English in volumes 1 and 3 of the Handbook of South American Indians (1946–1959), more references can be found in Curt Nimuendajú, As lendas da criação e distruíção do mundo como fundamentos da religião dos Apapociva-Guaraní (São Paulo: Editora HUCITEC: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1987).
51 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 24. Another interesting note refers to the ingestion of the vipers’ liver mixed well with food, and apparently capable of saving the lives of those poisoned by vipers’ bites.
52 “El hombre y lo sobrenatural,” 136.
53 Jean Baptista, 2004, 73.
54 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 25.
55 Western narratives would often purposefully portray Indigenous people as lacking any skills, making this source even greater in relevance.
56 Cadogan (Ayru Rapya: Textos miticos de las Mbyá-Guaraní del Guairá, São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo, 1992, 119–136) had collected myths among the Mbyá-Guarani. Of special interest is one that refers to the twin brothers Kuaray and Jasy, who were raised by jaguars that had killed their mother. Upon discovering that fact, they avenge her death by killing all the jaguars in the world, except for one female jaguar pregnant with a male with whom she eventually breeds—hence the existence of other jaguars in the world. Kuaray curses the surviving jaguars making them all lose their “human appearance,” reappearing in the known animal form. Humans learn how to survive in the forest with the jaguars, but as enemies, due to this traditional rupture between these cultures. Baptista (2004, 64) analyzes the myths and explains that the remaining jaguars end up becoming rival tribes with whom the Guarani engage in war, which partially explains why hunting and or killing a jaguar is so often recorded by both colonial sources as well as contemporary ethnographies.
57 An annual letter dated 1627 from the reduction of Iguazu (MCA, Vianna, 67), retells how the Jesuits built a trap to hunt down a jaguar who had attacked a child at the mission. The trap worked, and the missionaries boast of acquiring the “fame of being killers of tigers,” recognizing the importance of such a feat for effective group leadership. Jean Baptista (2004, 66) suggests that the missionaries were immersed in the Guarani world since they avenged the original history of the cultural heroes—the twin brothers.
58 Besides the aforementioned annual letter, there is another interesting reference dated 1633 that was authored by padre Pedro Romero (MCA, Cortesão, 42–3) who narrates a similar plot of trapping a jaguar by orchestrating with relatives of the jaguar’s victims.
59 It is important to note that among the Kaingang people, the same animal reflects the group’s being (Nimuendajú 1993, 72), while the Guarani see the jaguar as a horrible being, their historical enemy. The Kaingang are the jaguars, essentially.
60 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 55.
61 Many traps are similar to hunt different animals such as pigs and deer (MCA, Cortesão, Tape, 81), and the tapirs’ case described here.
62 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 26–7.
63 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 56. Another similar case of the presence of an animal and a resulting death was mentioned concerning frogs. To talk about this other superstition, Montoya recounts a time when they were aboard a vessel that carried frogs that could be heard for two days, making the Indians search for the animals due to their fear of their death. Although reported by Montoya as an unrelated matter, four Indians aboard these vessels died after the fact.
64 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 57.
65 Montoya (Conquista espiritual, 45) compared the yerba with the tea from China since both are stimulating drinks that awake the one who drinks it, as well as with the coca leaves in Peru.
70 In many cases, the Jesuits would have to deal with wizards even before they died, due to the worship of the remains of famous wizards, which were sometimes worshiped within the church itself. Such was the case of four bodies and bones that had “been revered in the church,” recorded by Montoya (Conquista espiritual, 117–122). Additionally, Sarreal (2015, 37) tells us that the Jesuits worked hard to “suppress the shaman” figures.

71 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 200–1.
72 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 187–8.
73 As Sarreal (2014, 56) reminds us that the “Guarani generally joined a mission as a part of a cacicazgo led by a cacique.”
74 Jesuits gave the caciques the titles of “Don” (Sarreal 2014, 56).
75 Sarreal, 54.
76 Montoya acknowledges that each cacique converted represents a great possibility to convert more Indians, for instance, the great cacique Tayaoba, governor of the province with the same name, was leading several indigenous groups (Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 123–7 and 128–31).
77 These obligations and privileges were distinct in the Guarani mission and elsewhere in Latin America (Sarreal 2014, 56).
78 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 94–5.
79 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 55–6.
80 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 55–6.
81 This was especially true of caciques and sorcerers, and if not observed was considered a “misfortune” (Conquista espiritual, 99).
82 There are several references in contemporary ethnographic works that suggest eloquence as one necessary trait of caciques (Schaden, Aspectos Fundamentais, and Melià, Conquistado y Reducido), especially in colonial sources such as Montoya’s writings. For instance, there is a reference about a cacique who makes a “rather eloquent speech” and thus saves the missionaries from dying in the hands of the Indians during their arrival to the village that would later become San Francisco Xavier (Conquista espiritual, 96).
83 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 59–61.
84 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 62.
85 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 65.
86 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 92–3.
87 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 77.
88 Both polygamy and adultery continued up to the 18th century (Wilde, Religión y Poder, 133).
89 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 74–5.
90 Montoya, Conquista espiritual, 46.
91 Notion coined by many other missionaries, including classics works like Bartolomé De Las Casas, The Destruction of the Indies (New York: Penguin Classics, 1992).
92 The Destruction of the Indies, 41–45.
93 There are records of armed Guarani populations defending the missions dated 1639, yet only the Jesuits received firearms in 1647, and the Guarani militias became the king’s militias in 1649 (Sarreal 2014, 33).
95 Brooks, Captives & Cousins, 72–79; Pekka Hämäläinen, Comanche Empire (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).
97 Brooks, Captives & Cousins, 67–69.
98 Brooks, Captives & Cousins, 68.

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