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The Guaraní Under Spanish Rule in the Río de la Plata

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The Guaraní Under Spanish Rule in the Río de la Plata. Barbara Ganson. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. xii + 290pp., maps, illustrations, appendices, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. \$65.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-8047-3602-2. [www.sup.org]

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Barbara Ganson examines changing Guaraní social formations in the context (and aftermath) of the Jesuit missions of the Río de la Plata basin from the 1500s to the mid-nineteenth century. Based on archival materials, Guaraní letters, and secondary sources, Ganson argues that Guaraní were not “passive receptors of European culture,” but were able to “make many of their life decisions and determine their own destinies” (pp. 5-6). Ganson argues that this attention to Guaraní protagonism differentiates the study from others in the field. The reader is introduced to Guaraní *caudillos*, teachers, musicians, cattle thieves, artisans, shamans, and scribes—as well as a cast of their interlocutors, Jesuit and otherwise—through a rich mining of archives that portrays Guaraní lives across three centuries of change. The work is an excellent overview of the mission era and the related historiographic corpus.

The first part of the book retraces the rise of the Jesuit missions. Chapter one sketches Guaraní life before and during the early Spanish period, suggesting that despite the violence of reductions and *encomiendas*, Guaraní/Spanish relations were shaped as much by mutual accommodation as by overt domination. Chapter two introduces Jesuit missions and governance strategies. The Jesuit-backed formation of Guaraní militias is discussed as a key example of limited Guaraní “autonomies” that served both the crown and the Guaraní. Chapter three examines mission life—with special attention to shifting male-female relations—including economics (yerba plantations, artisanship, cattle ranching, and shifts in gendered division of labor), social control (schooling, discipline, and religion), and political institutions (*cabildos*). Ganson suggests that “transculturation” involved Guaraní selection and rejection of elements of European culture based on their utility. In the second, richest part of the book, Ganson explores colonial geopolitics from the Guaraní War (1755–1756) to the dissolution of the missions as corporate entities with the rise of independent states in the mid-nineteenth century. Chapter four examines the Guaraní War in detail, highlighting Guaraní autonomy in military action and use of knowledge of the colonial polity to defend the missions. Chapter five discusses the post-Jesuit period, tracing effects of out-migration, interethnic marriage, and economic decline. Chapter six examines the mission region in the era and wake of the Independence Wars. Ganson highlights Guaraní military service, resistance to abusive priests, and use of the legal system as well as individual strategies of accommodation, flight, and petty crime. Chapter

seven argues that the persistence of practices like witchcraft even after the mission period demonstrates cultural “resiliency.” The maintenance of ethnic difference is noted even as the Guaraní are transformed into a regional underclass in the 1800s.

The work’s principal limitation stems from a notion of culture as an “idealized pattern of meanings, norms, and social values shared by members of a society” (after Axtell) and of power as “the capacity of human beings to shape the actions and perceptions of others by exercising control over the production, circulation, and consumption of signs and objects” (after Jean and John Comaroff). These concepts are not developed in depth in relation to the material. Thus, agency is construed as the outcome of choices made in a confrontation between two unequal “cultures” operating on conflicting motives (p. 181). Resistance notwithstanding, the dissolution of the Guaraní as distinctive sociopolitical formations and the emergence of a “racialized” underclass marked by gendered and linguistic difference in the era of the nation-state seems to suggest something beyond the outcome of competing choices and motives. Were one so inclined, the rich material allows for a rethinking of notions of state formation and the expansion of global capitalism. The Guaraní, like most native peoples, were connected to the global system as labor—though simultaneously instrumental to competing state-like polities because of their place on shifting frontiers (between Spain and Portugal). This dual positioning explains spaces of autonomy and might nuance understandings of cultural transformation beyond explanations based on Jesuit motives and Guaraní choices. Or, following Michel Foucault (mentioned in the introduction, but nowhere reengaged in the text), one might consider transformations of Guaraní bodies and modes of resistance as a case of emergent “governmentality,” or as a critique of the concept. The author’s priority was to identify signs of cultural survival as iconic of resistance (based on a problematic usage of culture as a historically rooted essence) rather than to theorize transformation in relation to sociologically grounded concepts of meaning and power. One is left with signs of difference, privileged as markers of an abstract (at times atemporal) yet ever “tenacious” Guaraní agent, who nonetheless disappears in the wake of colonialism.

Ethnohistorical method is often weakened by speculation. Cultural practices such as the “bone cult” are taken without critique as a significant survival (but as Hélène Clastres points out in *Land Without Evil*, the evidence relies only on the claims of Montoya, and has not been noted in other Guaraní contexts). Discussions of endocannibalism and its later traces (e.g., see p. 169) are unconvincing. Etymological discussion of terms translated from the Guaraní, such as *tupá*, *yvy marane’y*, *mbabucu oicone*, and *tuvicha*, could be elaborated.

Ganson includes a nice discussion of literacy and schools, though many questions about language remain. The appendix includes Guaraní letters (in

English translation) cited to demonstrate modes of resistance. Ganson argues rightly that the “[book] demonstrates the value of using native language sources to elucidate the ideas and world views of these indigenous people” (p. 184). However, the author does not delve into the original Guaraní and basic textual exegesis is lacking. Though publishers are generally reticent to do so, inclusion and discussion of the original Guaraní would strengthen the work. Maps demonstrating the geopolitical shifts of the Independence period would also be helpful.

The book is a necessary addition to any library of colonial histories of the Americas and complements Spanish and Portuguese language work on the case of the Guaraní. It will be essential for graduate students new to the field of South Amerindian ethnohistory and Guaraní studies, is an excellent resource for experts, and is a valuable documentation of the struggles of South American indigenous peoples against and within colonialism.

Beneath the Equator: Cultures of Desire, Male Homosexuality, and Emerging Gay Communities in Brazil. Richard Parker. New York: Routledge, 1999. xvi + 288 pp., plates, maps, tables, notes, appendices, bibliography, index. \$85.00 (cloth), \$22.95 (paper). ISBN 0-415-91619-4, 0-415-91620-8. [www.routledge-ny.com]

Travesti: Sex, Gender and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes. Don Kulick. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. xi + 269 pp., notes, references, index. \$50.00 (cloth), \$20.00 (paper). ISBN 0-226-46099-1, 0-226-46100-9. [www.press.uchicago.edu]

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Urban cultures are every bit as relevant to the anthropology of lowland South America as are indigenous and rural cultures. In both cases, we encounter unique local perspectives and practices in dynamic relationships with regional and global processes. In this review, I discuss two fascinating books that address Brazilian configurations of male homosexuality. Latin American, and especially Brazilian, sexualities have received considerable attention for involving gender structures that contrast with those that typify Western cultures. These two books examine these complex issues from very different angles. Richard Parker, in *Beneath the Equator: Cultures of Desire, Male Homosexuality, and Emerging Gay Communities in Brazil*, addresses Brazilian homosexualities with a sweeping analytical brush, emphasizing their diversity and their relationships to broad historical processes. In contrast, Don Kulick, in *Travesti: Sex, Gender and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*, takes a very intimate