

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ***THE MISSION AND HISTORICAL MISSIONS***

#### **FILM AND THE WRITING OF HISTORY**

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*The Mission (1986); produced by Fernando Ghia and David Puttnam; directed by Roland Joffé; written by Robert Bolt; color; 126 minutes; Goldcrest. Father Gabriel (Jeremy Irons), a Jesuit missionary in colonial Paraguay, converts the pagan Guarani Indians to Christianity and saves slave trader Rodrigo Mendoza (Robert DeNiro) from despair. They all live together in peace until political considerations in Europe require that the Jesuits abandon their mission to the Portuguese, who threaten to re-enslave the natives.*

Because of the power of film, movies with historical themes affect public perceptions of the past more deeply than do scholarly reconstructions. Filmmakers and historians search for meaning in separate ways, but their quests can converge. Examples of different approaches to similar destinations are found in a newer film and older historical views of Catholic missions in South America. *The Mission*, directed by Roland Joffe with a screenplay by Robert Bolt, displays paternalistic attitudes like those of an earlier generation of North American academic historians.<sup>1</sup> The film's voice is a white European distortion of Native American reality. This essay will examine that voice, offer alternative explanations of

historical events, and suggest a research agenda for future study of the Guarani missions of Paraguay, often mentioned in surveys but seldom studied by North American historians.

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Academic mission history pioneers in the United States, including Herbert Eugene Bolton and his students Peter Masten Dunne, S.J., and John Francis Bannon, S.J., would find comfort in *The Mission*.<sup>2</sup> English Jesuit Philip Caraman's *The Lost Paradise: The Jesuit Republic in South America?* which informs the screenplay, is a bastard stepchild of scholarly histories. Claiming "The historical events represented in this story are true, and occurred around the Spanish borderlands of Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil in the year 1750," the creators of *The Mission* invite historians to test their assertions. Bolt and Joffe in fact scorn accuracy and twist the truth, even though as artists they may legitimately reorder events, create new characters, and still retain historical integrity.<sup>4</sup>

In *The Mission*, as in the Boltonians' works, Native Americans appear throughout, but no Indian viewpoint emerges, even though creating three-dimensional Guaranis is as easy for filmmakers as it is difficult for historians. The ethnocentrism that treats Indians as mission furniture was an unpleasant part of the dominant culture of historians of Bolton's Berkeley seminar before World War II, and such a bias against Native Americans is even more objectionable for works like *Lost Paradise* (1976) and *The Mission*, which were created when decent men and women were expected to be sensitive to insulting stereotypes of colonized peoples.

Located in Jesuit Paraguay in the 1750s, the movie's climax is the Guarani War of 1754-1756, during which historical Guaranis defended their homes against Spanish-Portuguese forces implementing the Treaty of Madrid of 1750.<sup>5</sup> *The Mission* is partly narrated by "Altamirano" (Ray MacAnally), a cardinal and papal legate who "used to be a Jesuit." He corresponds to an Andalusian Jesuit, Father Luis Altamirano, who went to Paraguay in 1752 as Jesuit General Ignacio Visconti's appointee to transfer territory from Spain to Portugal. Visitor plenipotentiary with absolute authority over Platine Jesuits, Altamirano oversaw the attempted exchange from Spain to Portugal of seven missions<sup>6</sup> south and east of the Rio Uruguay in return for other regions, according to the Treaty of Madrid. Reflecting in 1758 on the late Guarani War, the movie Altamirano says, "The Indians are once more free to be enslaved by the Spanish and Portuguese settlers," a misleading assertion initiating the ideological confusion to follow.

Joffe puts conversion efforts "above the falls," where Jesuits took religion to Indians "still in a natural state," presumably without religion, and received martyrdom in return. The movie location recalls missions founded on the Rio Paranapanema from 1610-1630 above Guaira Falls, from which Brazilian slave raids forced Guaranis and Jesuits to flee in 1631.<sup>7</sup> The moviemakers' site, far from the seven missions traded to Portugal, substitutes historical accuracy for the spectacular scenery of Iguasu Falls, a harmless trade-off.

In this wilderness, several nearly naked, painted Native American males (played by Onam's of Colombia) carry a priest lashed to a cross to the river, which sweeps him over the falls to his death. How did the priest offend the Guaranis? Because the movie never says, one inaccurately

concludes that customarily killing whites was their nature. This initial "Indian problem" forecasts the ethnic and ethical confusion of Bolt and Joffe.<sup>8</sup> In the sixteenth century, historical Guaranis first accepted Catholic missions in the Rio de la Plata because there they received protection from their Native American and European enemies and steady supplies of such iron tools as hatchets and knives, which revolutionized their lives. When Guaranis initially encountered Europeans in the early 1500s, they lived in the northern Rio de la Plata and southern Brazil in fourteen *guards*, regional-ethnic groups that included Carios of the Asuncion area, Tobatines, Guarambares, and also the Tapes, who eventually settled the missions west of the Rio Uruguay.<sup>9</sup> At contact, Carios allied with Spaniards for help in struggles with Guaycuruan enemies to the west.

Guaranis gave Spaniards women, work, and food in exchange for military protection. The early amicable Spanish-Guarani relationship, based on reciprocity and linked by marriage and kinship, soon became exploitative. Guaranis realized that their presumed alliance of equals had become burdensome, and they unsuccessfully rebelled in 1539 and 1542. Formalized in 1556, the *encomienda mitaya* conditioned relations between Guaranis in central Paraguay and Spanish settlers, establishing regular labor service of Indians under Spanish masters for the rest of the colonial period. Owing to epidemic diseases of European origin and the loss of men and women to Spanish employment, Guarani settlements in touch with Asuncion suffered.<sup>10</sup>

After 1580, Guaranis accepted missions from Franciscan friars, the first missionaries, whom they saw as more powerful magicians than their own shamans. Guaranis called Luis de Bolanos, O.F.M., *Pa'i*, their word for their own religious functionaries and the name of their culture hero Pa'i

Sume. At Altos, over a thousand Guaranis gathered to found a mission so that Bolanos and other Franciscans could protect their crops from the onslaughts of Spanish cattle." Most early Guarani-Franciscan reductions,<sup>12</sup> including the surviving towns of Ypane, Guarambare, Atyra, Tobati, and Yaguaron, were founded in the eastern part of the present republic of Paraguay; and, except for the towns of Caazapa and Yuty, secular clergy replaced Franciscans, as the monarchy intended.

A Paraguayan historian says, "Franciscan reductions were open, flexible and adapted to reality, as distinct from those of the Jesuits, where everything was ordered and preestablished." Many Franciscan missions survive today as Paraguayan communities, but few Jesuit-founded establishments do.<sup>13</sup> Despite the difference between open and closed policies toward Spanish officials, employers, and merchants, however, the early Franciscan and later Jesuit missions were fundamentally similar. In both instances, Spaniards concentrated Guaranis then living in dispersed settlements into towns laid out on European models and indoctrinated them into Christian ideology and European customs.<sup>14</sup>

Jesuits founded missions in Paraguay beginning in 1610. Guaranis in what is now northern and southern Paraguay, Parana and Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil, and the Misiones province of Argentina—who were then beyond the effective exploitation or protection of the Asuncion government—gradually moved to missions. They welcomed Jesuit gifts of iron tools, which increased agricultural productivity by drastically reducing the time needed to cut trees and clear land for crops. Guarani missions staffed by Jesuits occupied five regions of the upper Plata. Soon-to-be-abandoned locations were Itatin in northern Paraguay and Guaira, east of the Alto Parana, but the southern area came to form the heart of

the Guarani reductions. This complex was divided into three clusters: between the Rio Tebicuary and the Rio Parana, between the Parana and the Rio Uruguay, and east of the Uruguay. Guaranis and Jesuits erected thirty missions there by 1700, and in Taruma in eastcentral Paraguay, they settled two more by 1750. Allowed the use of firearms, Guaranis quickly learned European military tactics from Jesuits. Organized into as many as eight militia companies per mission, Guaranis repelled the less disciplined forces of slavers from Sao Paulo.<sup>15</sup> Because *The Mission* martyr's goal was to convert his eventual killers, his duty falls to his superior, Father Gabriel (Jeremy Irons), the hero of the film. The Jesuit paddles upriver alone against the current,<sup>16</sup> ascends the falls,<sup>17</sup> and explores the dark Guarani land armed only with his oboe. His playing entices the simple movie Guaranis into choosing a mission. The bizarre suggestion that Guaranis accepted missions for European music echoes Caraman.<sup>18</sup> Although the screen people are seemingly hunters and fishermen, aboriginal Guaranis were horticulturalists who supplemented garden plots with hunting.<sup>19</sup> Agrarian peoples with an abundance of fertile land for crops if only they could clear the trees, Guaranis welcomed missions for the steady supply of iron implements supplied by Jesuits. Hatchets and machetes worked wonders. The Guaranis' agricultural traditions provided them with habits of cooperation and with technical skills essential to mission prosperity.



Father Gabriel uses music to charm the Guaranis. *Courtesy Museum of Modern Art*

The celluloid Indians, though, befriend Father Gabriel and accept the Jesuit mission for European music and for refuge from lay Paraguayan slavers. Captain Rodrigo Mendoza (Robert DeNiro), a "mercenary"<sup>20</sup> and Indian hunter,<sup>21</sup> who tours the new mission area for Indian slaves, typifies Spanish corruption and cruelty. He sells Guaranis to the venal governor of Paraguay, Don Cabeza (Chuck Low), and executes Indians whom he could snare and sell for profit.

As in New Mexico, settlers in the greater Rio de la Plata enslaved Indians, outright and under cover of the *encomienda originaria*.<sup>22</sup> Yet

these were atypical ways of oppression, not characteristic regional labor institutions. When the film denounces Paraguayan employers' "slavery" of Native Americans, it seems to mean the traditional *encomienda*, in Paraguay called the *mitaria*. In this institution in the 1700s, adult males owed two months' annual labor to *encomenderos*, service on public works to the province, and community service to the village. Denouncing the labor practices of lay Paraguayans, the script recreates the language of colonial Jesuits, not disinterested observers but advocates. When describing *encomienda*, they aimed to persuade the crown to exempt "their" Guaranis from labor obligations to other Spanish employers.<sup>23</sup>

Rewriting history, the filmmakers introduce specific changes that nonetheless raise important issues. One is Jesuit "martyrdom," a complex problem. There were few Jesuits martyred by Guaranis in the 1700s, although many were earlier. The likeliest eighteenth-century candidate was Father Lucas Rodriguez, who, "after a long search of the fugitive Itatines, amid continual showers and thick woods, expired shortly on his return home."<sup>24</sup> From the Native American point of view, however, the "martyr" label is a pernicious European construct. Guaranis thought that they executed Jesuit transgressors for just cause. Another change is geography. Either San Joaquin or San Estanislao, in Taruma northeast of Asuncion, is apparently a model for the film's new mission. Joffe simplified the Spanish-Portuguese deal of 1750 (seven towns east of the Rio Uruguay) for the story of the movie's San Carlos (actually shot at Santa Marta, Colombia) and San Miguel, the largest of the seven rebel missions,<sup>25</sup> whose movie representation resembles San Ignacioazu more than San Miguel. Simplification lets Joffe avoid material issues, including real estate and livestock that Jesuits wished to retain. Joffe thus ignores Jesuit

and Guarani economic motives for resistance and presents the moral issue as Jesuit/good and Spaniard/bad. As compensation for the transfer, the crown promised each mission 4,000 pesos, or about 1 peso each for the 29,191 Guaranis of the seven missions. The lands, livestock, and buildings of these seven missions, however, were actually worth from 7 to 16 million pesos,<sup>26</sup> and Guaranis and Jesuits felt cheated.

Movie slave hunter Mendoza metamorphoses from violent villain to peaceful hero. After killing his brother, Mendoza withdraws from the world. Father Gabriel assuages Mendoza's guilt by letting him serve Guaranis. As penance, he drags a sack of armor until a Guarani severs him from his burden. Guarani witnesses to this act rejoice with words so trivial that Joffe thinks them unworthy of English translation. Movie Guaranis have such limited reason that gestures and Jesuits adequately represent their thoughts. The filmmakers assume Jesuit policies identical with Guarani interests, untrue historically and unconvincing on film.

Until now, Joffe's and Bolt's Indians have expressed nothing. Guaranis without English lines project a limited capacity. Unlike historians, who have few documents with authentic Guarani voices, the filmmaker's calling lets him fashion Guaranis with a full range of human responses.

*The Mission*, therefore, like the history of missions by American academics before 1960, is about priests, imperial administrators, and settlers. When movie missionaries help Guaranis build the mission of San Carlos,<sup>27</sup> they revolutionize a backward society. The film overlooks the fact that these activities were adaptations of aboriginal skills necessary for making tools and weapons, building homes, and raising crops. Explaining transitions from aboriginal to European-dominated ways should be an important part of the next histories of Guarani missions.

When the camera turns to women's work, it shows bare-breasted Guarani mothers bathing their children, as in an old *National Geographic*. Movie Jesuits, unlike real missionaries, are comfortable with public female nakedness. In the 1700s, though, Father Martin Dobrizhoffer, S.J., knew that breasts were "parts of the body . . . which modesty commands to be concealed." He also noted that the Guarani women of Taruma were "decently clad from the shoulders to the heels."<sup>28</sup> As these are the women who would have settled San Carlos, naked screen women alter history for prurient effect.

The San Carlos Guaranis embrace Mendoza, who now loves but remains superior to them. When they capture a pig, for example, Mendoza refuses to kill it. Guaranis who kill little pigs are brutal primitives. Mendoza's gentle tolerance lets him lose a "king of the canoe" game with an Indian boy. Rodrigo thanks Father Gabriel for receiving him in the missions, and the priest says, "You should thank the Guarani." Why he should thank them is unclear. The film Guaranis were never consulted about Mendoza's refuge, just as real Guaranis would have had no say about European visitors to their mission.

Mendoza loves God and the Guaranis but does not love the Indians enough to learn about their ways. Film Jesuits imagine that Guaranis who joined missions immediately accepted Christianity, a historically inaccurate supposition. Most Guaranis rejected Christianity for decades, often generations.<sup>29</sup> In missions, Christian concepts clashed with aboriginal beliefs, and Guarani ideology failed to appreciate good and evil, sin, and other Christian doctrines. Thus, the conversion to Christianity by people without religion is ethnically demeaning, another image of "the white man's Indian."<sup>30</sup> Guaranis believed in capricious

magical spirit powers, and native religious practitioners sought to persuade them to help and not to hurt their clients and themselves. Only shamans could influence these supernatural souls and only by magical means. From spiritual protectors, *tupichuds*, shamans derived their considerable authority. In the early years of the Jesuit enterprise, for example, a religious leader named Nezu convinced other Guaranis to desert the missions of Todos los Santos del Caaro.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, technical adviser Caraman thinks that, "From the forests, Indians came into the settlements drawn by the magnificence of divine worship and slowly penetrated the veil of drama to the truths of the Christian faith."<sup>32</sup> This assertion is wishful thinking, little related to the reality that Jesuit missionaries knew.

*The Mission* trades historical authenticity for a movie paradise. While the camera moves slowly over forest, village, and beautiful Guaranis, the lush score of Ennio Morricone romanticizes primitive life. Mendoza removes a splinter from a Guarani woman's foot, a task that only movie priests could perform better than other Guarani women. Suppressing the conflict that punctuated life in all missions, additional scenes show a paradise of interracial harmony, peace, mutual contentment, and the thriving economy of San Carlos. Guaranis and priests cultivate fields together, as they often did historically during the first years of a new mission.

In Asuncion, Europeans gather to debate the fate of the missions and the legal and moral status of the Indian. Joffe here resurrects for the 1750s issues of Indian personhood that historical Spanish monarchs and theologians settled in the 1500s, a chronological rearrangement that blames Spanish lawmakers for the sin of neglecting Indian rights, of which

they are innocent. Spanish concern included royal orders of 1503, the Laws of Burgos of 1512, and the New Laws and Ordinances of His Majesty for the Government of the Indies and Conservation of the Indians of 1542-43. The New Laws declared Indians free persons and vassals of the crown of Castile, outlawed future enslavement, prohibited branding, disapproved of Indians' rendering personal service to Spaniards, and set limits on tribute. In Paraguay, the Ordinances of Alfaro set high standards for Spanish conduct.<sup>33</sup> Laws in missions were the laws of Spain, and Jesuits and Guaranis usually obeyed them.<sup>34</sup> If these laws were too often ignored by others, their existence still shows a care for Indian well-being. Denying this concern confirms movie anti-Hispanicism. When Don Cabeza brands a San Carlos boy a "child of the jungle" to be subdued by force, Father Gabriel replies, "Guarani are not naturally animals. They're naturally spiritual";<sup>35</sup> but he gives no example of Guarani spirituality, obviously unworthy of explanation. He does, though, offer a gratuitous and culturally relativistic explanation of Indian infanticide. Guaranis kill children to escape Spanish slavers. They must execute infants whom they cannot carry as they flee. The Spanish menace dooms the rest. Guarani actions are only reactions to Spanish aggression. This logic would have horrified real Jesuits, who hated infanticide.<sup>36</sup>

Infanticide marked the culture of the Guaranis' nonsedentary Chaco enemies, constantly following game and ripening fruits and burdened by numerous infants, but it was of limited utility to Guaranis. Because they were an agrarian people, they mostly rejected infanticide." They needed boys for agricultural labor. Girls the matrilineal Guaranis prized because they attracted husbands to the band and brought growth and stability.

Defending a tradition foreign to Guaranis, Joffe denies their identity. In the same way, he has Paraguayans lie about owning Indian slaves so that Father Gabriel can insist that they do.<sup>38</sup> The priest asserts that colonists hate Jesuit missions because they draw Indians from Paraguayan oppressors, who, he later shows, beat their workers.

Historical Jesuits mixed coercion, persuasion, and material rewards to bring Guaranis to missions with the discipline that kept them there, and Guaranis in missions were unfree. Jesuits subjected them to a centralizing discipline and to economic conformity. Missions did not attract Guaranis from the civil province of Paraguay, whose ethnic origins were different and whose feelings for mission residents were hostile. In fact, some residents of missions fled north from ecclesiastical jurisdiction to the civil province of Paraguay, where the government allowed them to sell their labor services on the open market, a right forbidden by Jesuits. Moreover, in Jesuit missions, beatings were not unknown.<sup>39</sup>

Father Gabriel's movie Guaranis "come to us of their own free will" and stay because nine-tenths of their earnings return to their communities. Did mission Guaranis dispose of their harvests and herds as they wished? Only movie Guaranis have such choices. A priest of the great mission of San Miguel says that last year's income was shared equally among the people of the mission, implying that they controlled it. In fact, historical Jesuits supervised mission harvests, surpluses, and access to the market, and Guaranis yearned for more participation. Priests locked produce in mission warehouses and invested in other Jesuit enterprises.<sup>40</sup> Guaranis could not remove the fruits of their labor from mission repositories without permission. At times, Guaranis resisted; they broke the rules, broke the locks, and shared the surpluses. Caciques, whose status was

hereditary, more often complained about the constraints than did Indian corregidores, appointed by Jesuits. In 1735, for example, the caciques of eight missions, led by Diego Chaupai, demanded a greater voice in economic decision making and also insisted on a greater sexual freedom, which they thought proper for men of their rank.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, the movie raises an issue that future histories of Guaranis missions must include: a comparison of the daily lives of mission Guaranis and those of the civil province. The organizing principles of the civil province towns, which took lasting form in the late 1500s, and the towns of the Jesuit province, mostly founded in the 1600s, were the same. In both administrative regions, Europeans brought Guaranis together in towns, reeducated them in the norms of Christian civilization, and dominated their economic and social lives.<sup>42</sup>

Eighteenth-century Guaranis had three alternatives to Jesuit missions. One was living in such towns as Altos, Atyra, Tobati, Yaguaron, Guarambare, and others, where they worked for their encomendero, their community, and the provincial government. Another was the wilderness beyond Spanish control, where a few Guaranis, the Monteses, still lived. A third alternative was to escape "Indian" status. Guaranis could merge into the general population while working for wages in Asuncion, Corrientes, or Santa Fe. Earlier Guaranis became non-Indian Paraguayans, although they and their descendants continued to speak Guaraní well into the twentieth century, by remaining permanently on the estate of their encomendero as dependent peons after performing their labor obligation. That colonial Guaranis elected to remain with encomenderos warns us against facile generalizations about labor systems.

The Indian towns of Paraguay were not havens. Guaranis fled them,

leaving their families destitute. Controls in the civil province were less effective, and escape was easier. Thus, coercion, important to the daily lives of Guaranis, must be an issue of new mission histories; but examination of it will produce different versions explained from royal, Jesuit, Paraguayan, and Guarani perspectives. No one should be surprised to find that mission Guaranis disliked beatings as much as those to the north did. Similarly, historians must also compare the labor of people in the *encomienda* towns and missions,<sup>43</sup> where, as in the film, Indians performed for European directors.

To complete his assignment, Altamirano visits the "great mission of San Miguel." Although resigned to sacrificing missions to save the Society of Jesus, he is overwhelmed by "the beauty and the power" of the movie mission, reflecting historical achievements, which were in fact considerable. Jesuit prosperity was in part built on the profitable sale throughout South America of yerba mate, a tea made from the shrub *Ilex Paraguayensis* and drunk by the popular classes in the Rio de la Plata, Chile, and Peru. Jesuit exploitation of the yerba market was more efficient and more profitable than that of their lay Paraguayan competitors, partly owing to low labor costs in missions. The missions also kept great herds of livestock for domestic consumption and sale. In 1768 the Guarani missions of the departed Jesuits had almost 700,000 cattle, over 240,000 sheep, 73,850 mares and horses, 15,235 mules, and 8,063 asses, about what they possessed in the 1750s. Guaranis slaughtered cattle for hides to sell at Buenos Aires and drove mounts and draft animals to sale in the Argentine northwest and Upper Peru.<sup>44</sup>

In the film, Altamirano marvels at Guarani educational success, a bounteous mission orchard, and Indian singing. Guaranis making violins

fascinate him. These images proclaim Jesuit love, not Guarani capacity, and the movie's historical and Indian problems are revealed by the appearance of a Guarani priest at San Miguel, because there were no Indian Jesuits in Paraguay. "Persons of Indian extraction were never adopted into the number of priests or brothers," Father Dobrizhoffer boasted.<sup>45</sup>

At San Miguel, Altamirano witnesses the scars on an Indian "slave" inflicted by a Paraguayan master; the man improbably fled from a civil province estate to the missions. When Indians deserted Paraguay, though, they headed not to missions, whose people they disliked, but to Corrientes, Santa Fe, and Buenos Aires, just as mission Guaranis did when the opportunity arose.<sup>46</sup> In these jurisdictions, they had the opportunity to escape the category "Indian" and could choose employers. When Altamirano visits San Carlos, he finds a "Garden of Eden," where Indians nevertheless lack personalities. At the mission, Joffe has them cheer, clap, whistle, dance, sing, wrestle, and reply to Jesuits in "Guarani."<sup>47</sup> These Guaranis have no myths, legends, or religious beliefs. They have no shamans. No leader challenges Jesuit authority, as did Tape shamans Yaguarobi and Yeguacaporu in 1635 as they resisted Jesuit efforts to bring their people to missions.<sup>48</sup> Movie Guaranis are cultural ciphers.

Altamirano must order Indians from their homes. "Though I knew that everywhere in Europe states were tearing at the authority of the Church," he says, "and though I knew well that to preserve itself there, the Church must show its authority over the Jesuits here, I still couldn't help wondering whether these Indians would not have preferred that the sea and wind had not brought any of us to them."<sup>49</sup>



Guaranis finally resist. Joffe, however, conceals Indian decision making, recording only a missionary's paraphrase. In the 1750s the Guarani fight to retain the seven missions was a natural response to an ill-considered crown act. The Indians had contested Portuguese attacks for a century and hated them. In the 1630s, Paulistas had carried off thousands of Guaranis to Portuguese masters, until Jesuit-organized Guarani forces with firearms stopped them at the battle of Mborore.<sup>50</sup> Living in missions west of the Uruguay for decades, Guaranis were rooted there by the 1750s. So strong an attachment to place as to lead to war is less comprehensible for movie Indians, newcomers to their mission. Through Father Gabriel, a movie cacique asks why God had them build a mission and changed his mind. This question lacks verisimilitude because Guarani deities reversed themselves whimsically, and such a turn would have seemed normal.

Condemned by Joffe to communicating through a priest, the nameless movie cacique declares that he will resist the royal order by force. To protect the Society of Jesus, Altamirano sends missionaries back to Asuncion. Fathoming the intentions of the then king of Spain, Ferdinand VI, and of the next king, Charles III, who expelled the Jesuits in 1767, the legate prophesies the Order's fate.<sup>51</sup>

Unlike historical Guaranis, who resisted Catholic belief and cherished their own for decades,<sup>52</sup> San Carlos Guaranis have embraced European ideas and discarded their own, signifying little attachment to earlier ways. One example occurs as Fathers Gabriel and Altamirano approach a mission girl who says through Father Gabriel that she fears "the jungle" because "the Devil lives there," and that Guaranis "want to stay here." Had the filmmakers imagined that Native Americans had interior lives, this exchange could have shown how Europeans confused aboriginal deities

with Christian devils. Eighteenth-century theologians denied "that any man in possession of his reason can . . . remain ignorant of God for any length of time." Living in Jesuit missions east of the Guarani settlements, Abipones called their shamans *Keebet*, after a spirit power on whom they often called for help. These religious functionaries were believed by Jesuits to be tools of "the devil" or were "devilish workers."<sup>53</sup>

Because they love the Guarani, Father Gabriel and Mendoza remain in the mission, violating their vows of obedience. English priests, Fathers Ralph and John, also disobey.<sup>54</sup> Because Mendoza prepares movie Guaranis for war, Father Gabriel warns him not to die with blood on his hands.

As Spaniards force Guaranis from missions,<sup>55</sup> the film's antiHispanicism intensifies. At San Miguel, Spanish soldiers abuse unresisting Indians, an unnecessary act that prejudices their interest in Guarani labor. Soldiers show how brutal are Spanish militiamen, whose sadism outweighs their economic interest. They strip the Indian priest of his clothes. Troops who humiliate a helpful cleric are stupid. When they make mothers put children in deep puddles of water, the film's confusion grows. Why would militiamen, whose superiors covet Guarani workers, irritate peaceful natives?

In San Carlos, Guaranis choose between Jesuit paths of resistance,<sup>56</sup> the nonviolence of Father Gabriel and the armed rebellion of Fathers Ralph, John, and Mendoza. While Gabriel and old Guaranis pray in church, the other three priests and most male Guaranis prepare for war. Arranging for hostilities is more difficult in the movie than in historical missions, where an effective militia protected reductions beginning in the

1640s.<sup>57</sup> To recognize the missions' military potential and the Guaranis' century-long mastery of firearms, though, did not suit Joffe's purpose. Tutored by Europeans, his Guaranis fashion cannon from hollow logs, following historical practice. Led by Mendoza, they raid the Spanish camp for weapons. Mendoza retrieves his rust-free sword from the stream where it reposed.<sup>58</sup>



Rodrigo Mendoza prepares for war. *Courtesy Museum of Modern Art*

The priest-led Indian resistance of the film was an all-Guarani affair historically. An early advocate of resistance was Cristobal Paica, originally from Martires, who had returned from his Brazilian exile to rouse the

people of San Nicolas. Of the forty-five caciques of this mission, forty-one opposed the move. The first overall military leader was Cacique Jose, or Sepe Tiarayo (Sape Tiaraju to the Portuguese), *alferez real* of the historical mission of San Miguel. In one of the early skirmishes of the war, Sepe fell victim to allied fire, and Nicolas Neenguiru, corregidor of Concepcion, took his place as spokesman. Guarani troops in the 1750s addressed these leaders as *iianderubicha*, meaning captain.<sup>59</sup>

San Carlos Guarani of the movie resume aboriginal attire, paint themselves for war, and follow Jesuits into battle. From the church, Father Gabriel heads the passive resistance. In bewildering battle scenes, Father Fielding shoots at invaders and leads them over the falls to death while Mendoza fires on royal positions. Resisting Spanish authority, priests die with Guarani. Why create a Jesuit resistance when Jesuits insisted credibly that they had no part of treason?<sup>60</sup>

Movie Indians need Jesuit help. Joffe's Guarani are incapable of independent resistance. In historical fact, though, "This was a genuine and spontaneous revolt by the Guarani. The Jesuit authorities formally surrendered the . . . missions to the royal government. But no one could force the Indians themselves to comply." They even threatened Altamirano, for whom they had no respect. He fled the missions because he feared Guarani violence.<sup>61</sup>

Uniformed government killers in the film butcher surrendering Guarani—as historical allied armies massacred them, though not Jesuits, at the battle of Caaibate,<sup>62</sup> which broke Guarani resistance. The immediate cause of the slaughter was lack of unity of command within the Guarani forces. Captains of militia companies made crucial decisions

without coordination. Early in the conflict, Guarani fought successfully at the small-unit level. In a Europeanstyle battle like Caaibate, however, where their sixteen hundred soldiers were outnumbered by about a thousand, lack of overall discipline was decisive. The movie soldiers and their Native American allies then set San Carlos ablaze.<sup>63</sup> European troops murder Father Gabriel and a procession of unarmed worshippers. This scene is another black-legend characterization because sending Indians to forced labor would be more rational and profitable. In the final scenes, Altamirano condemns the excessive slaughter, but the Paraguayan governor defends the killings. As a counterpoint, beautiful young Guarani survivors retrieve a cross from the river. Still preferring European culture to their own, they paddle off treasuring a violin.

This confused yet beautifully filmed and scored movie<sup>64</sup> addresses important issues of mission history. The filmmakers' image of Native Americans resembles that of the academic pioneers of mission history, although the movie's spiteful anti-Hispanicism would be anathema to the Boltonians.

An example of the film's "Indian problem" is the origin of the Guarani War. Did Jesuits precipitate it? Did they favor armed resistance? How could Guarani, often called docile puppets of priests, rebel without Jesuit encouragement? No scholar has yet shown priests culpable. Future ethnohistorians will likely conclude that Guarani were never terribly docile or obedient,<sup>65</sup> because these able warriors rebelled against encomenderos in the 1500s and against Jesuits in the 1600s. In missions, they resisted Jesuit authority frequently, as in the case of residence choices. Many Guarani moved to the missions' outskirts, rejecting cells built for them by Jesuits. Males departed missions for commerce and war,

often disobeyed Jesuit instructions, mutinied, and rioted. Men who fled missions rejected Jesuit tutelage for greater autonomy in Hispanic communities, as the communally supported residences for femaleheaded families testify. In the late colonial period, Guaranis of Santa Maria de Fe, led by Crisanto Tapucu, rebelled against creole invasion of formerly protected lands.<sup>66</sup> Contradicting the movie picture of immediate conversion and acquisition of European ways, only slightly attenuated in some mission histories, aboriginal traditions persisted in the historical missions, as seen in the continuing desire of caciques for plural marriages in 1735.

*The Mission's* contempt for Native Americans grows from a Jesuit-centered point of view gone awry, echoing the academic founders of mission history. In his classic 1917 article, Bolton told historians to explain Spanish colonial policy, although he denounced propaganda that romanticized missionary heroics. In Bolton's history, Indians were on the peripheries because Bolton and his contemporaries were Eurocentric.<sup>67</sup> Bolton's own task was to explain how "Spain extended her rule, her language, her law, and her traditions." The customs of Native Americans were less important to him. Relegating "barbarian" peoples to an inferior position, he emphasized the "civilizing function of the typical Spanish mission."<sup>68</sup>

An even more passionate endorsement of missionary accomplishment than Bolton's is *Pioneer Jesuits in Northern Mexico*, by Peter Masten Dunne, S.J., whose treatment of Indians was more hostile and more racist than his mentor's. A history of missions of the 1950s is *The Mission Frontier in Sonora, 1620-1687* by John Francis Bannon, S.J., anti-Indian and Eurocentric but more moderate than Dunne. Nevertheless, David J.

Weber criticizes Bannon for not acknowledging that "the Jesuits' 'success' might have represented another people's loss."<sup>69</sup>

Because Bolton, Bannon, and Dunne were the best of their generations, our criticism of them must be reasoned. Surely our own students will one day judge us for sins of which we are as yet unaware, and the strengths of the Boltonians were many. When Americans often heard that Hispanic peoples were inferior, lazy, and stupid, the Boltonians insisted that Spanish Americans had virtues. They wrote clear narratives carefully grounded in archival sources and set high scholarly standards.

The same cannot be said for *Lost Paradise*, the book most like *The Mission*. Caraman's racist attitude toward Native Americans and Spaniards is a parody of scholarly mission histories. Although *The Mission* strives to be politically progressive, it is compromised by its racism. One regrets that Father Daniel Berrigan,<sup>70</sup> supporting actor and technical adviser to the film, cares little about accuracy. Although he and Joffe oppose injustice and endorse humanitarian policies toward the oppressed, the film's demeaning of Guarani culture weakens their case.

The history of Guarani missions should be reinterpreted by placing the missionized at the center of the investigation. This will mean adopting an Indian point of view to the limited extent that the canons of our craft permit.<sup>71</sup> Obstacles to telling the story from an Indian viewpoint include an insufficiency of written sources<sup>72</sup> and the rules of our profession, a culture-bound endeavor. Standards of our guild deny us the opportunity to adopt wholly Native American attitudes and demand opinions that we derive from the scientific revolution.<sup>73</sup>

In the future, historians must begin with aboriginal Guarani society as a

baseline and explain native adaptation to Hispanic domination in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Scholars must investigate Guarani life in encomienda towns under Franciscan and secular priests and must explain their similarities to the Jesuit missions. They must probe the postexpulsion lives of Guaranis. A preview of this approach can be found in Paraguayan anthropologist Branislava Susnik's *El rol de los indigenas en la formacion y en la vivencia del Paraguay* and her *Aborigenes del Paraguay*, suggestive works but no substitutes for multiarchival history.<sup>74</sup>

Creating a portrait of life in Guarani villages of the civil province is a part of the general history of colonial Paraguay. For Guaranis, one aspect of this was the encomienda, which lasted in Paraguay until the end of the colonial period. In the eighteenth century, for example, while most Guaranis lived in Jesuit missions, over 7,800 Guaranis lived in the civil province towns of Atyra, Altos, Tobati, Caazapa, Yuty, Yaguaron, Yta, Guarambare, and Ypane, where they were subject to the encomienda. The historian can thus reconstruct their lives from encomienda records available in the Archivo Nacional de Asuncion (ANA). One useful source is the record of visits of the governor to these towns, a record originally collected for purposes of taxation and social control. These data can tell us the size of the Guarani villages of the civil province. They additionally give the names and families of females; the names, families, and ages of males; and the names of fugitives from these villages and how long they were gone. One can also reconstruct family groupings, retirements for men, and the names of refugees from the Jesuit and former missions who had come to live in the civil province. The Guarani complaints of ill-treatment by their encomenderos allow historians to investigate labor

conditions. More formal sources can also reveal Guarani information. Encomienda titles, for example, contain information on Indian leaders, because caciques were present at the investiture of encomenderos.<sup>75</sup>

Even the most traditional kind of source, communications between Spanish bureaucrats, will often yield precious information on Guarani conditions. Letters in the Seccion Historia of the ANA, normally considered the least innovative kind of document in the most traditional section of the Paraguayan archives, reveal that Guaranis from Guarambare, Yta, and Yaguaron were moving into the larger society of Paraguay as they worked in the shipyards of Asuncion in the 1790s. There they received two reales a day and the meat, tobacco, corn or manioc, and yerba mate that they thought was the least that they needed to survive.<sup>76</sup> In the same way, traditional sources in the Audiencia de Charcas and Audiencia de Buenos Aires sections of the Archivo General de Indias in Seville contain countless nuggets of information of ethnohistorical value to the student of Guarani life in the civil province of Paraguay in the seventeenth century.

Future histories of Paraguayan missions that compare Guaranis of the civil and mission provinces from precontact to the Triple Alliance War should account for daily life, religion, economy, demography, politics, and warfare from about 1500 to 1850. They must not, however, neglect traditional themes: how priests treated their flocks, policies of imperial and local governments, changes in Spanish society, settler avarice, and labor practices. Crucial manuscript records are in archives in Rome, Seville, Asuncion, Santiago de Chile, and Buenos Aires, and much material has been published. For the next students of Guarani-Jesuit missions, a recent article by Ernest J. A. Maeder gives a clear and comprehensive

guide to the published sources, most of which are of Jesuit origin.<sup>77</sup>

Yet the secondary works and documents, to which the Boltonians also had access, are less important than sensibility. To advance beyond our academic parents, this generation must see the Guaraní story as important. The major research tool, therefore, is the historical imagination that makes Spanish documents reveal Guaraní truths. Historians must let archaeology, maps, oral traditions, and language study help shape the Guaraní account of the mission experience.

For the Guaraní past, the most important sources necessary for an ethnohistorical reinterpretation are also the most traditional ones—writings of Jesuit missionaries. Seen from a Native American angle, even familiar sources can yield new information. Jesuit Dobrizhoffer's *An Account of the Abipones: An Equestrian People of Paraguay* patronizes Native Americans in the manner of even altruistic European colonizers, but it contributes to an understanding of the nature of rebel leadership in the Guaraní War. Nicolas Neengiru was the second leader of the insurgency, and enemies of the Jesuits called him the "King of Paraguay." Father Martin tells his story to refute contemporary charges that the Society sought to create an independent political entity in Paraguay. In his account, however, he includes data helpful to understanding Guaraní relationships.<sup>78</sup> Ridiculing the idea of a Guaraní king, Dobrizhoffer says, "At the very time when the feigned majesty of the King of Paraguay employed every mouth and press in Europe, I saw this Nicholas Neengiru, with naked feet, and garments after the Indian fashion, sometimes driving cattle before the shambles, sometimes chopping wood in the market-place; and when I considered him and his occupation, could hardly refrain from laughter."

Dobrizhoffer further notes that Don Nicolas, as residents of his own mission would have known him, was corregidor of Concepcion, located between the Rio Uruguay and the Rio Parana. During the war, Guaraní followers referred to him as *nanderubicha*, or captain, meaning a military leader. Significantly, they did not employ the term *mburubicha*, meaning king or chief, a political designation. Father Martin then supplies valuable information about Neengiru's life—what his fellow Guaranís thought of him; that he held many offices in Concepcion; that he had married there; that he had suffered an affront to his dignity when Father Ignatius Zierheim had him publicly whipped; that he was tall, good-looking, and grave; that he went barefoot even though a respected Indian officeholder; that he himself drove cattle and chopped wood despite his position; and that even after the Guaraní War he continued as corregidor with the approval of the governor of Buenos Aires. Readers closely following Dobrizhoffer's argument, though, or those who read him principally to understand Jesuit missionaries, could miss the meaning of this information.<sup>79</sup>

Another example of how missionary sources provide evidence for conclusions distant from those of the authors comes from *Hacia alia v para acd*, Father Florian Paucke's memoir of the Mocobi mission of San Javier. Paucke described Mocobi cacique Cithalin as a "bad Indian" because he got drunk and was un-Christian and, from the missionaries' point of view, untrustworthy. He was opposed by his brother-in-law and rival cacique Aletin, a "good Indian" in the eyes of missionaries. Aletin could please the priests better than his rival. Paucke nevertheless shows the careful reader the Native American meaning of the rivalry between the two Mocobi leaders. Their differences arose from differing degrees of

attachment to traditional ways. Paucke inadvertently tells how Aletin used the priests' favor to gain high office and financial rewards. He became foreman of the mission estancia because of his ability to please Europeans, but Mocobis recognized Cithaalin as socially superior, the son of more illustrious parents. Paucke thus provides evidence for the Mocobi view of Cithaalin even though he himself thinks of him as a wayward child.<sup>80</sup>

A third example comes from the Mbaya mission of Belen, in the north of Paraguay. There, Father Jose Sanchez Labrador thought, Guaycuruan men were lazy because they rejected what he and other Europeans deemed productive work for Indians. Seen from the Mbaya male's point of view, however, the very behavior that the priest condemned—reluctance to work in the fields, staying in shape for hunting and combat, making and repairing weapons while telling stories about the behavior of character animals—shows that Mbaya men were industrious at tasks that *they* valued, such as training and tending horses, metalworking, or the obligations of war. The missionary assumption of Indian laziness really meant only that Native Americans rejected stoop labor in the fields. They turned their backs on missionary ideas of proper behavior for subject peoples, which the men of the mission associated with women's work.<sup>81</sup>

The challenge facing the next historians of Guarani-Jesuit missions, therefore, parallels that faced by the team that made *The Mission*: to create a Guarani humanity. These artists needed no documents. They had only to understand that Guaranis were culturally whole. Instead, they created Indians without culture. They did not imagine that Guaranis had inner lives apart from the Jesuits, as any group would. Future historians must correct their errors.

### Suggested Readings

- Becker, Felix. *Un mitojesuitico: Nicolas I, Rey del Paraguay: Aportacion al estudio del ocaso del poderio de la Compahia de Jesus en el siglo XVIII*. Asuncion: C. Schauman Editor, 1987. A study of the allegation that Jesuits intended to create an independent state in South America.
- Berrigan, Daniel, S.J. *The Mission: A Film Journal*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986. A memoir of the experience of moviemaking by a Jesuit who was both a technical adviser for the film and an actor.
- Bolton, Herbert E. "The Mission as a Frontier Institution in the SpanishAmerican Colonies." *American Historical Review* 23 (October 1917): 42-61. The pioneering and influential study of mission policy by an important early authority.
- Caraman, Philip, S.J. *The Lost Paradise: The Jesuit Republic in South America*. New York: Seabury Press, 1975; New York: Dorset Press, 1990. A popular, readable, and biased account of the Jesuit province of Paraguay that is unsympathetic to Native American culture.
- Furlong [Cardiff], Guillermo. *Misiones y sus pueblos de guaranies*. Buenos Aires: n.p., 1962; Posadas, Argentina: Lumicop, 1978. The still standard encyclopedic work on the Guarani missions by an Argentine Jesuit.
- Ganson, Barbara. "Like Children under Wise Parental Sway: Passive Portrayals of the Guarani Indians in European Literature and *The Mission*." *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 3 (Fall 1994): 399-422. A recent analysis of how *The Mission* compares with European literary assessments by a well-informed and able younger scholar.
- Hemming, John. *Red Gold: The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978. A comprehensive

history sympathetic to the plight of the Native Americans includes Paraguay as well as Brazil.

Langer, Erick, and Robert H. Jackson. *The New Latin American Mission History*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. A guide to mission history that represents the state of the art.

Mateos, Francisco, S.J. "La Guerra guaraníca y las misiones del Paraguay: Primera campana (1753-1754)." *Missionalia Hispanica* 8, no. 22 (1951): 241-316; and 9, no. 25 (1952): 75-121. A factually reliable account of the Guarani War told from the Jesuit point of view.

Southey, Robert. *History of Brazil*. 3 vols. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810-1819; reprint ed., New York: Greenwood, 1969. A classic work, parts of which remain useful today, by an English playwright and poet.

Susnik, Branislava. *El rol de los indígenas en la formación y en la vivencia del Paraguay*. 2 vols. Asuncion: Instituto Paraguayo de Estudios Nacionales, 1982-83. The best survey in Spanish, written by a Paraguayan anthropologist with remarkable insight into Guarani culture.