STRATEGIES OF THE FRENCH CAPUCHINS TO EDUCATE THE TUPINAMBÁS OF MARANHÃO (1613-1614)

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Estrategias de los capuchinhos franceses para educar a los Tupinambás de Maranhão (1613-1614)

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Abstract: This text analyzes the strategies employed by the French Capuchins to educate the Tupinambás of Maranhão in 1613 and 1614. The source is the travel literature called *Continuation of the history of memorable things that happened in Maranhão in the years 1613 and 1614*, written by the Capuchin friar Yves d'Evreux. In order to understand this process, the dialogue was established with Agnolin (2006), Anchieta (1933), Cardim (1925), Chambouleyron; Bombardi (2011), Daher (1999), Gasbarro (2006), Métraux (1950), Monteiro (2000), Montero (2006), Nóbrega (1988), Pompa (2006), and Viveiros de Castro (2002). The educational strategies used by the Capuchins for the Tupinambás adapted missionary experiences from other locations to the reality of Maranhão. Devotion to the cross, for instance, aimed to fill the gap of material elements that would guide the natives toward the spiritual realm. The production of collaborators aimed to increase the small number of educators and broaden the scope of catechization to include the formation of catechumens.
Keywords: education; indigenous peoples; Amazonia.

Resumo: O texto tem por objetivo analisar as estratégias utilizadas pelos capuchinhos franceses para educar os Tupinambás do Maranhão nos anos de 1613 e 1614. Tem como fonte a literatura de viagem, denominada *Continuação da história das coisas memoráveis acontecidas no Maranhão nos anos 1613 e 1614*, de autoria do frade capuchinho Yves d'Evreux. Para compreender esse processo, o diálogo estabelecido foi com Agnolin (2006), Anchieta (1933), Cardim (1925), Chambouleyron e Bombardi (2011), Daher (1999), Gasbarro (2006), Métraux (1950), Monteiro (2000), Montero (2006), Nóbrega (1988), Pompa (2006) e Viveiros de Castro (2002). As estratégias educativas empregadas pelos Capuchinhos para os Tupinambás representam esforços em adaptar à realidade do Maranhão, experiências missionárias de outras localidades. A devoção a cruz, por exemplo, visava preencher a falta de elementos materiais que direcionasse o nativo à dimensão espiritual, por sua vez, a formação de colaboradores, tinha a finalidade de aumentar o diminuto número de educadores e tentar ampliar o alcance da catequização voltada a formação dos catecúmenos.
Palavras-chave: educação; indígenas; Amazônia.

Resumen: El texto tiene como objetivo analizar las estrategias empleadas por los capuchinos franceses para educar a los Tupinambás de Maranhão en los años 1613 y 1614. Su fuente es la obra titulada *Continuación de la Historia de Hechos Memorables Ocurridos en Maranhão en los Años 1613 y 1614*, escrita por el fraile capuchino Yves d'Evreux. Para comprender este proceso, este estudio se apoya en los trabajos de Agnolin (2006), Anchieta (1933), Cardim (1925), Chambouleyron y Bombardi (2011), Daher (1999), Gasbarro (2006), Métraux (1950), Monteiro (2000), Montero (2006), Nóbrega (1988), Pompa (2006) y Viveiros de Castro (2002). Las estrategias educativas que los capuchinos emplearon entre los Tupinambás son un esfuerzo por adaptar experiencias misioneras de otras regiones a la realidad de Maranhão. Por ejemplo, la devoción a la cruz tenía como objetivo suplir la falta de medios materiales que orientaran al nativo hacia la dimensión espiritual. Por su parte, la formación de ayudantes buscaba aumentar el reducido número de educadores y ampliar el alcance de la catequización encaminada a la formación de los catecúmenos.
Palabras clave: educación; pueblos indígenas; Amazonía.

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INTRODUCTION

The text analyzes the strategies employed by the French Capuchins to educate the indigenous Tupinambá of Maranhão between 1613 and 1614. The historical context is the period described in the work of Friar Yves d'Évreux.

The Capuchins are a religious order belonging to the Franciscan family. According to Camacho (2014), the Franciscan Order originated in Italy in the 13th century and was founded by Francis of Assisi. According to Capuchinhos (2022), the aforementioned religious order was divided into three branches in the 16th century: Friars Minor, Friars Minor Conventual, and Friars Minor Capuchin.

At the beginning of the 17th century, four French Friars Minor Capuchins (Yves d'Evreux, Claude d'Abbeville, Arsenius de Paris, and Ambroise d'Amiens) came to Maranhão intending to educate the Tupinambá people. However, they were actually part of a colonization mission that came to Maranhão to establish Equinoctial France. The mission aimed to exploit the native labor force and the wealth of northern Brazil.

According to Pinto (1950), the word Tupinambá was a generic term used by the invaders. However, each village had a specific name. For Jecupé (1998, p. 49), the etymological origin of the term indicates that the Tupinambás were direct descendants of the founding leaders of the nation, that is, the "[...] first descendants of the Tupis."

The experiences of these religious men were published in two works: *History of the mission of the Capuchin Fathers on the Isle of Maragnan and the surrounding lands*, written by Father Claude d'Abbeville; and *Continuation of the history of the most memorable things that happened in Maranhão in the years 1613 and 1614*, also by Father Yves d'Evreux. The work of this religious man, the source of this study, portrays the wealth of the northern region of Brazil, the knowledge and educational practices of the Tupinambás, and the strategies the Capuchins used to educate them.

To discuss this source, we consulted the following authors: Agnolin (2006), Anchieta (1933), Cardim (1925), Chambouleyron; Bombardi (2011), Daher (1999), Gasbarro (2006), Métraux (1950), Mintzberg; Quinn (2001), Monteiro (2000), Montero (2006), Nóbrega (1988), Pompa (2006), and Viveiros de Castro (2002).

The missionary strategies of the Capuchins in Maranhão consisted of a set of actions developed before and during the evangelization process. These actions aimed to convert indigenous people to Christianity and integrate them into colonial society. Shaped by the objectives of the Catholic Church and the demands of colonization, these strategies mixed cultural adaptation with the imposition of European models. This approach was in constant negotiation (or confrontation) with the state and native communities.

The text is structured into two topics:

a) "Strategies for Evangelization and Education," which addresses the strategies employed by the Capuchins for the education and evangelization of the Tupinambás of Maranhão. These strategies included visits to villages, sermons, distribution of priests, baptisms, and devotion to the cross.
b) "Linguistic and Collaborative Development," which focuses on the efforts of the Capuchins to produce collaborators and the grammaticalization of the Tupi language. Together, these strategies demonstrate the scope of the education the Capuchins implemented for the Tupinambás of Maranhão.

EVANGELIZATION AND EDUCATION STRATEGIES

Visits to villages, sermons, and distribution of priests

Educational strategies were implemented through visits to the villages on Maranhão Island by the French Mr. Des Vaux, Mr. de Razilly, Father Claude d'Abbeville, among others. These visits aimed to familiarize themselves with the native leaders in order to convince them to adhere to the Catholic religion and the authority of the King of France. This demonstrates an attempt to co-opt the existing power structures of the Tupinambás for French interests.

After the initial visits, the Capuchins realized the size of the region in which they would be working. Due to the small number of missionaries, they decided to split up and reside in the main villages on Ilha Grande. Thus, Father Arsenius stayed in Juniparã, Father Ambroise in Eussauap, and Father Ives in Forte São Luís. Father Claude continued visiting the villages. The missionaries made this decision considering the difficulties of mobility and transportation since many villages could be accessed only by rivers and streams. Unfortunately, the missionaries faced adversity from the beginning with the sudden death of Father Ambroise d'Amiens in October 1612. His death reflected the challenges and dangers of exploration and colonization at that time. In December of that same year, missionary Claude d'Abbeville returned to France, leaving the mission under the responsibility of just two Capuchins: Arsenius and Yves d'Evreux.

Another strategy initially employed by missionaries in Maranhão was to hold conferences—that is, meetings held in Big Houses, residences, churches, and village squares. These conferences expedited missionary work by bringing together larger groups of people. They were also well-accepted by the Tupinambás because discourse held great value in their culture (Viveiros de Castro, 2002).

Several topics were discussed during the conferences, as reported by Evreux (2002, p. 282). Initially, the missionaries sought to convince the natives that they were their "[...] faithful friends, more than their fathers, mothers, and other relatives." Later, the religious leaders presented the benefits and gains that the Tupinambás could expect from this friendship. This included "reforming their lifestyle" and guaranteeing that the missionaries would provide them with human resources and weapons according to their needs: "Our king is strong and powerful and will always help you with weapons and men." Then, the missionaries taught the natives about the "true" God, the creator of the world, infinitely good, who promised us heaven if we obey Him in this life." Finally, they said that "[...] they came to defend (the natives) from their enemies" (Evreux, 2002, p. 284).

At the conferences, the Capuchin fathers gave a speech asserting that the education implemented in Maranhão was associated with French colonial policy. This policy aimed to align the interests of the Tupinambás with those of the French Crown.

The Capuchin mission primarily focused on educating civility and converting the Tupinambá to Christianity. This demonstrates an intention to reform the native lifestyle and present the idea that the "true" God is the path to happiness. This intention reveals a lack of recognition and respect for the religious beliefs and culture of the indigenous peoples of the region. Imposing the European lifestyle and faith as the only correct way reflects a colonizing mentality that often uses coercive methods to impose the colonial religion and way of life on the natives.

Abbeville (2008) presents the repeated speech of Mr. *des Vaux* during his visits to the Tupinambá villages, revealing the intentions behind the colonization of Maranhão. According to the speech, the main objective was to exploit the region's natural resources while recognizing the need for the natives' knowledge and collaboration regarding the forest.

The Capuchins sought to "civilize" and catechize the natives, spreading the Catholic faith in the region. Meanwhile, the Tupinambás wanted protection and to continue trading European goods, such as axes, sickles, fishhooks, mirrors, and necklaces. The Tupinambás expected to receive these objects and utensils as gifts when hosting foreigners (Evreux, 2002).

The French exploited the interests of the Tupinambá leaders, such as protection and trade, to pressure them into declaring themselves subjects of the King of France. The French threatened to abandon the region if their objectives were not met. Thus, the economic and religious interests of the French and the Tupinambá were intertwined during the early days of colonization.

Baptism: between conversion and negotiation

Baptism is a religious ritual that marks the conversion of catechumens[1] to the Christian faith, symbolizing a transition in their lives. This sacrament symbolizes adherence to a new religion and the possibility of expelling old beliefs and spiritual practices, as well as the salvation of the soul.

Christian missionaries dedicated themselves to baptizing the native populations. An illustrative example of this process is found in the account of Father Yves d'Evreux, who recorded the conversion of a native leader in the village of Orobutim. The leader stated that after becoming a Christian, he no longer feared the evil entity *Jerupari*. This demonstrates how baptism can help natives overcome their fears.

During the baptism ritual, the Capuchins publicly questioned the catechumens about their renunciation of Jerupari and his diabolical customs, which included practices such as cannibalism, execution of enemies, polygamy, and other abominations learned from their ancestors under the influence of this evil spirit. The catechumens gave affirmative answers individually, highlighting their personal responsibility as converts. Then, the young people publicly confessed their past sins, received forgiveness, and did penance, committing themselves to never again practicing acts condemned by the Christian faith.

Thus, the demonization of local customs was part of the education promoted by the missionaries, who emphasized the importance of baptism as a turning point in the lives of the catechumens. They were required to affirm their loyalty to the new faith and swear that they would never abandon it (Abbeville, 2008).

Over time, the missionaries noticed ambiguities in the motivations of the natives. For example, the Jesuit priest José de Anchieta (1933), for example, noted that the catechumens initially demonstrated great faith, but this faith was often motivated by the hope of profit and vanity, causing inconsistency in their adherence to the Christian faith.

> It is true [...] that our catechumens initially demonstrated great faith and probity. However, since they are more motivated by the hope of profit and vanity than by faith, they are not persistent and easily return to their former ways at the slightest setback, especially since they have no fear of Christians (Anchieta, 1933, p. 208).

The Jesuit Father Manuel da Nóbrega (1988) also expressed the perception of the natives' volatile faith. He believed that by visiting their tents and offering material incentives, he could convert the natives to Christianity. However, he recognized that

[1] A person who receives religious instruction to be baptized and join a religion (Dicio, 2023).

their instability would lead them to easily convert and deconvert due to the difficulty of internalizing true faith.

> These have one reason, the worst of all, that when they come to my tent, with the hook that I give them, I will convert them all, and with others I will deconvert them again, because they are inconstant, and true faith does not enter their hearts (Nóbrega, 1988, p. 320).

This observation highlights the challenges missionaries faced when trying to evangelize indigenous populations, who often adhered to Christian beliefs for reasons other than religious conviction, such as tangible benefits.

According to Father Yves d'Evreux (2002), the faith of the Tupinambás was fickle. He illustrated this instability by recounting the story of a chief who asked him to bring his son, Acajuí-Miri, closer to God. Initially, the child demonstrated fervent faith and enjoyed the priests' company, but later, he began to avoid them, fleeing into the woods when he saw them.

> [...] right from the beginning, after becoming a Christian, the boy behaved well. He knew how to read a little in the *cotiare* and how to write. He was always with the priest and followed him everywhere. However, he later abandoned this life, embracing freedom. He forgot what he had learned and fled to the woods when the priest came looking for him (Evreux, 2002, p. 351).

According to Viveiros de Castro (2002), the Tupinambás' inconstancy of faith—they were eager for religious teachings but returned to their "old superstitions"—indicates that they did not share the same concept of "choice" about religion, which was essential for the Christian missionaries. In several passages, the Capuchins describe how the Tupinambás demonstrated their desire to learn about the afterlife (e.g., the Christian faith, Christ, God, the final judgment, the Christian interpretation of life after death, and how to defend oneself from Jerupari). Thus, the priests began to focus their educational efforts on this content, with salvationism and eschatological expectations standing out.

By adding a touch of fear and the possibility of controlling Jerupari, the "evil" spirit that tormented the island's inhabitants, missionaries sometimes managed to obtain temporary positive feedback from catechists and catechumens. However, when they were out of sight of the priests, they returned to their old customs, which the priests deemed anti-Christian and uncivilized.

The stereotypical portrayal of indigenous people as "leviano," or someone willing to do anything for a handful of hooks, reflects the colonizers' lack of understanding of indigenous communities' social and cultural dynamics. This image contributed to justifying colonization and imposing the Christian faith, as well as perpetuating stereotypes about indigenous peoples that persist to this day. On the one hand, the natives were lured into conversion by gifts, and on the other, the missionaries were willing to use questionable strategies to achieve their religious objectives and control over the indigenous populations.

This ambivalence was also reflected in the natives' perspective. Some treated the missionaries as "wise idiots" from whom they could obtain valuable goods in exchange for superficial gestures of conversion. Others merely verbally adhered to the Christian faith to be left alone (Viveiros de Castro, 2002).

However, it is important to note that many natives did not adopt Christianity solely for reasons of faith. This conversion did not always reflect genuine religious adherence. Many natives were motivated by material gains, and their faith was often unstable. Viveiros de Castro (2002, p. 221) observed that the decision to believe or not was often shaped by the material advantages that could be obtained through conversion. This led to a certain instability in the faith of converts, who could easily abandon it in the face of setbacks or search of economic gains: "[...] to believe or not to believe, that is, for the indigenous, is a question answered by the material advantages that come from it." In other words, when the Tupinambá natives expressed their desire to convert to Christianity, they were immersed in a complex game of possible advantages. In this game, being like the whites and adopting their ways of life became a "[...] value disputed in the indigenous symbolic market."

However, this search for practical advantages and the adoption of a Christian identity did not necessarily correspond to the missionaries' objectives, demonstrating a divergence between the natives' motivations and the evangelizers' purposes: "[...] the becoming white and Christian of the Tupinambás did not correspond at all to what the missionaries wanted" (Viveiros de Castro, 2002, p. 223-224).

Other indigenous groups also played the game of advantage in search of protection. The Tapuias, for example, saw baptism as an opportunity to escape the threats posed by colonial expeditions and the Tupinambás's own wars. By approaching the priests and requesting baptism, the Tapuias found a way to obtain protection against these incursions. In addition to seeking physical safety, this gesture represented a form of cultural resistance because, by accepting baptism, the Tapuias returned their version of Christian teachings to the missionaries, thereby reconfiguring the cultural and religious dynamics of colonization. This context demonstrates how the adaptation and survival strategies of indigenous peoples often involved negotiating with colonizers and using available tools to protect their identity and autonomy.

The cross and symbolic control

One of the strategies of Capuchin education in Maranhão was devotion to the cross, erected in the village, requiring a certain degree of commitment from the natives to the colonizers, and, according to the Capuchins, enabled a connection with God, thus warding off the evils of Jerupari.

Father Abbeville (2008) explains that the cross planted in Maranhão signified that the French had taken possession of the land in the name of Jesus. Thus, the commitment of the indigenous people would be to God, the priests, and the French king. God was the only entity capable of freeing them from the traps of Jerupari, whom the Capuchins conceived as the devil himself and the principle of all evils. According to Father Claude d'Abbeville (2008, p. 166), the cross was "[...] a symbol of the eternal alliance with our God and the desire they demonstrated to belong to Christianity."

The cross became important in the implemented education because Christian values such as respect, devotion, and contemplation were learned around it. It represented a God who was killed to redeem humanity. According to Evreux (2002), it was not difficult to convince the Tupinambás to place crosses in their villages, because they already had the custom of placing wooden posts at the entrance to the villages to ward off evil spirits.

Father Claude d'Abbeville (2008) describes the custom of the indigenous people of placing a tall piece of wood on the road to their villages with a crosspiece on top as a superstition. They placed small shields made of palm leaves and painted black and red on this pole, showing the image of a naked man the size of two fists. When asked about the purpose of this piece of wood, the indigenous people explained that their shamans recommended it as a means of warding off evil spirits.

Cardim (1925) complements this understanding by stating that posts were erected in places visited by spirits, where vows were made. These posts may have been the same ones mentioned by Claude d'Abbeville (2008), and the paintings of naked men may have been interpreted as representations of evil spirits, expanding the religious significance of these cultural practices. Interestingly, the Capuchins saw the native custom as superstition, but they considered the erection of the cross as a symbol of devotion.

Métraux (1950) notes that missionaries promised to protect villages from evil spirits if crosses were erected. According to Friar Claude d'Abbeville, the natives of the island of Maranhão spread the news that the cross was effective in driving away the devil. This led indigenous people in other locations in the North region to send delegations to priests, requesting the installation of crosses in their villages to stop Jerupari attacks.

The cross filled the devotional space occupied by images of saints and the consecrated host in Europe. This replacement may have occurred because the

Maranhão colony had an abundance of wood to build the Catholic symbol and few images of saints, which were donated only to some indigenous authorities.

The cross served as a tool for cultural and material education. Its acceptance by the natives represented a covenant with God and a rejection of Jerupari. Upon seeing the blessed cross, Jerupari would retreat, even fleeing the region where the cross was erected. However, the indigenous people could not simply make crosses to ward off evil; for the cross to have power over darkness, it had to be anointed by priests. Therefore, the presence of priests was indispensable. According to the missionaries, the power of the cross over evil forces would only work if the indigenous people abandoned customs considered uncivilized, such as cannibalism, nudity, and polygamy. Therefore, they also had to obey social norms and fight anyone who tried to tear down the cross erected in the village.

Around the cross, the colonizers developed an educational strategy for the natives, seeking to make them receptive to the priests' teachings. They emphasized the importance of priests in activating the cross's symbolic power. At the same time, the missionaries guided the natives to follow the laws implemented by the invaders and abandon practices considered sinful. The missionaries defended the converts and encouraged the natives to resist those who did not accept French authority. They also forced the natives to fight the Portuguese if they invaded Maranhão.

LINGUISTIC AND COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Production of collaborators or multiplier agents

Another strategy employed by the Capuchins was to form collaborators or multiplier agents within the villages. For example, there is the story of Japiaçu's wife, whose name remains anonymous in the priests' narratives. She played a key role in her father's decision to receive baptism. Father Claude d'Abbeville's account (2008) also mentions *Acajuí Mirim*, a young man who was only nine or ten years old and played an active role in educating his relatives. Acajuí Mirim dedicated his time to religious teachings, making others repeat what they learned several times to improve their understanding and memorization. Due to the limited number of words for numbers greater than five in the local indigenous language, he drew signs on the ground with a stick or his finger to represent the Ten Commandments of the Law of God or the Seven Sacraments. This made it easier for his apprentices to understand what was being taught.

The priests also had the collaboration of indigenous people, educated and baptized by the Jesuits, to spread education among the natives. One of these collaborators was Sebastião, a Tupinambá interpreter who was married to Japuaçu's

eldest daughter. In the absence of the priests, he led the indigenous people, gathering them with the sound of a drum called uarará, which replaced church bells.

Sebastião led them to the cross, where they knelt and worshiped. They listened to the Sunday prayer in their native language. He came up with the idea to teach the natives to memorize prayers, such as the Hail Mary, the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Seven Sacraments, by singing them. This method enabled the natives to quickly and easily memorize the prayers.

Another Tupinambá interpreter who was educated and baptized by the Jesuits was Gregório, who was married to the daughter of the eldest chief of d'Usaap. Gregório also contributed to the religious education of the natives (Evreux, 2002).

The same author reported that Gregório obtained the help of a young, baptized Tupinambá named Miguel to educate his slaves. Miguel was dedicated to the Christian doctrine. However, his mother asked him to return home because she missed him. This prevented him from continuing to assist the priest: "I kept in my company a young man from *Tapuitapera*, named Miguel, already baptized, who knew the Christian doctrine very well, in order to teach it to my slaves" (Evreux, 2002, p. 150, emphasis in original).

Another important example was the Tapuitapera shaman Marentim, who adopted the name Martinho Francisco after baptism. According to Evreux (2002), Martinho Francisco became an important ally of the Capuchins from *Tapuitapera*, instructing the natives in the Catholic faith so they could be baptized.

The Capuchins viewed all baptized individuals as collaborators. An example of this mindset occurred when Father Yves d'Évreux (2002, p. 351) was approached by Iacupém, chief of the Canibaleiros tribe. Iacupém expressed a desire to be baptized to escape persecution by Jerupari. In response, the priest suggested that Iacupém seek instruction in Christian doctrine with his son, who had already been baptized. "[...] You also have your son, who knows the Christian doctrine. He can teach it to you and everyone in your house. He will do a better job than we do since he pronounces the words of your language well." This passage indicates that indigenous children played active roles in transmitting the faith and preserving Christian culture under the guidance of Capuchin missionaries.

These examples illustrate how the Capuchins sought to produce local leaders and agents of multiplication within indigenous communities to ensure the continuity of evangelization.

Descents

During the colonial period, missionaries implemented the controversial "descent" strategy as part of their educational approach. This practice involved negotiating the displacement of indigenous groups from their homelands to villages

created by the colonizers, which were often located in more accessible and controllable areas. The main objectives of the "descents" were to facilitate the conversion and retention of indigenous peoples to Christianity and ensure their labor was exploited by the colonial authorities. Displacing indigenous people to easily accessible regions "[...] constituted an important mechanism for the insertion of native labor (*sic*) that would serve the needs of missionaries, residents and the Crown itself" (Chambouleyron; Bombardi, 2011, p. 622).

The "descent" had economic, political, and religious objectives and often resulted in the disintegration of indigenous communities' social and cultural structures, causing them to lose land, traditions, and autonomy.

The Capuchins sought to attract villages to areas close to the Island of Maranhão and keep them separate from each other. They appointed their own administrators, who were subordinate to the French.

This strategy aimed to gather indigenous people on or near the Ilha Grande do Maranhão, where they would have the opportunity to grow food and become self-sufficient in case of conflicts with the Portuguese. As an immediate reward for accepting the "descent," the natives would receive iron tools, such as axes and sickles, to improve the cultivation of their fields, and also the promise of protection against their enemies, such as the Portuguese and rival villages.

> [...] everyone wanted to get closer to the French in order to know God, have iron axes and sickles with which to cultivate their fields, and be safe from their enemies. They planted a lot of cotton and other crops to offer to the French as a reward, asking nothing more than an alliance and protection in return (Evreux, 2002, p. 182).

Some shamans opposed abandoning their villages, moving to regions near Maranhão Island, converting to Christianity, and following the rules imposed by Christian religious leaders. They opposed the colonization of the region, instructing the natives to reject the proposal of descent, tear down the crosses erected in their villages, and flee to distant places. This undermined the priests' efforts to educate and convert the natives.

> During my two years in Maranhão, I witnessed this opposition in various ways. The devils made their fear and dread of God's name apparent, hindering our mission by persuading their most faithful sorcerers to order the nations under their control not to approach us. They instilled terror in the natives with the sign of the cross, inciting them to uproot them. They gave bad examples, such as ridiculing what we holy taught these barbarians. They often intimidated the inhabitants of Maranhão, *Tapuitapera*, Cumã,

> Caietés, Pará, and Mearim, making them flee to the woods and unknown places. They did this for fear of being arrested and taken captive by the French or Portuguese (Evreux, 2002, p. 320).

Grammaticalization of the Tupi language

Since the first contact with colonizers, the lands of present-day America have witnessed an effort by missionaries to translate and grammaticalize native languages for Christianization. This was done to facilitate religious conversion and colonial domination (Agnolin, 2006).

The Capuchins produced a grammar of the Tupi language based on the selection, simplification, and adaptation of native linguistic codes to the French language. This grammar was intended to facilitate understanding of Tupinambá culture, make the Christian message comprehensible to indigenous people, and reduce the otherness to enable conversion to the colonizer's identity. Thus, the Tupi language was subordinated to the Catholic identity and became a vehicle for disseminating the Christian faith among the natives (Daher, 1999; Montero, 2006).

The Tupi-French dictionary was produced through grammaticalization, and the catechism was translated into the Tupi language. This enabled missionaries to teach the fundamentals of Catholicism to indigenous peoples. The catechism was taught through listening and memorization and became the cornerstone of this missionary endeavor. Therefore, translation played an indispensable role in the expected transition of indigenous peoples to "civilization," representing one of the main instruments used by missionaries in the process of evangelization and cultural transformation.

According to Agnolin (2006, p. 206), the introduction of writing and grammaticalization decontextualized many words in the native language. This process manifested as "social detribalization," which recontextualized and restructured the language. With its fixed rules and structures, writing was linked to European culture and contributed to the dilution of indigenous communities' distinct linguistic and cultural characteristics. Thus, in addition to recording history, writing played an active role in shaping cultures and promoting the European civilizing process in colonized lands.

Missionaries operated with concepts and grammatical categories that did not exist in indigenous cultures. Thus, they had to create a language of mediation from indigenous cosmology that was symbolically negotiated with the Tupinambá ethnic groups and comprehensible to the natives and themselves: "[...] indigenous cosmology is constituted at the same time as a terrain and as a language of mediation" (Gasbarro, 2006, p. 104). As a result,

> the missionaries [...] changed the direction and meaning of the cultures of the 'savages,' inventing new codes of communication and new social equalities: God began to be identified as Tupã, and the devil as Jerupari (Pompa, 2006, p. 142).

This method of comparison followed medieval teachings about the struggle between good and evil, between Tupã and Jerupari, the baptized and the pagans, the Capuchins and the shamans, and the unbaptized indigenous people.

According to Gasbarro (2006), in an analysis of the history of civilizations and their cultural encounters, universality cannot exist without comparison. In turn, comparison depends on "de facto" and "de jure" relations. It is important to emphasize that this is not simply random miscegenation of ideas, but rather a process of relationships and comparisons mediated by the communication codes that societies use. The author also emphasizes that comparison emerges from correlations between different civilizations. As these interconnections multiply and become more pronounced, social practice increasingly requires systems of generalization. These systems are essential for including and reconciling cultural differences socially and symbolically, preventing them from being relegated to the status of radical "*otherness*," or being considered strange and incomprehensible.

> Comparison arises from the relations between civilizations. As these relations multiply and become more complex, social practice increasingly requires systems of generalization capable of including differences socially and symbolically, rather than excluding them as radical "otherness" (Gasbarro, 2006, p. 70).

According to Monteiro (2000), religious conversion for indigenous peoples was not merely a religious experience. Rather, it was the acquisition of a language that could express the meaning and limits of colonial domination. Conversion established a field of intermediation that delineated not only the submission of indigenous peoples but also provided tools for resistance. In other words, natives absorbed and transformed religious teachings according to their own representations. Initially, for example, the term "karaíba" referred only to *shamans*, but later it came to refer to "white men" and what natives considered "sacred," demonstrating how indigenous people reinterpreted and incorporated elements of Christianity into their belief systems. These conceptual changes were due to the linguistic instrumentation carried out by catechisms (Agnolin, 2006; Pompa, 2006).

The relationship between missionaries and indigenous peoples in the Americas was marked by an exchange of languages and symbols. Religious terms and concepts were adapted and reinterpreted, resulting in a mutual interaction, demonstrating that the relationship was more than the imposition of one culture on another. It was a

process of translation, adaptation, and reinterpretation on both sides. Symbols and words contributed to the formation of a new religious and cultural understanding.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

At the dawn of the 17th century, as Europe expanded its reach into the New World, four French Capuchin friars arrived in Maranhão on what seemed to be a noble mission: to catechize and educate the Tupinambás. However, behind their words of salvation was a much more earthly project called Equinoctial France, which sought to convert souls, control lands, and exploit riches.

The account by Friar Yves d'Evreux, *Continuation of the history of memorable things that happened in Maranhão* (2002), reveals this encounter between the missionaries and the indigenous people, which was marked by both domination and resistance.

The missionaries did not come to Maranhão by chance. Their presence was part of a French plan to consolidate their power in the region. They did not limit themselves to preaching; they became agents of a political game. They infiltrated the Tupinambá power structures, with the aim of winning souls and controlling the villages. When visiting villages to gain the trust of the local leaders, the Capuchins offered military protection and items, such as iron axes, mirrors, and fishhooks, in exchange for religious and political submission.

The sermons in the Big Houses, the heart of community life, followed a planned script. First, the friars introduced themselves as friends. Then, they announced the benefits of an alliance with the French. Finally, they introduced the "true God," who was portrayed as the only salvation against the evils of the "demon" Jerupari. Thus, faith was negotiated with the French promise of protection, gifts, and status for the natives.

Although baptism was the high point of the Christian ceremony, the missionaries' accounts are full of frustrations. The Tupinambás accepted the ritual, only to return to their old customs later. For priests such as Anchieta (1933) and Nóbrega (1988), this was proof of indigenous "inconstancy." However, as Viveiros de Castro (2002) suggests, there was more to it: the Tupinambás were playing the colonial game. They used baptism as a bargaining chip, accepting it when it was convenient for them without necessarily abandoning their beliefs.

Some leaders, like Iacupém, sought baptism to gain protection from enemies. Others, instigated by shamans, tore down their crosses and fled into the forest. This silent resistance, often erased from European records, shows that the indigenous people were strategists in a scenario of conquest, not passive victims.

The Capuchins were masters in the art of persuasion and knew how to use elements of indigenous culture to spread their faith. The Tupinambás already erected decorated posts at the entrances to their villages to ward off evil spirits. The missionaries replaced these posts with crosses, claiming that only crosses, blessed by priests, had real power.

This tactic created a dual dependence. The indigenous people needed the friars to "activate" the protection of the cross. Meanwhile, they were pressured to abandon practices such as polygamy, nudism, and cannibalism, which the religious considered to be "the work of the devil." Thus, the cross ceased to be merely a sacred symbol and became a tool of control and submission.

Due to the limited number of missionaries, the Capuchins resorted to a strategy of recruiting indigenous allies. Young people like Acajuí-mirim and translators like Sebastião were trained to teach the catechism in Tupi, using songs and drawings. These intermediaries were essential to spreading Christianity, but they also helped the Tupinambás reinterpret the faith.

The production of a Tupi-French dictionary and the translation of the catechism into Tupi were important educational strategies for the Tupinambás. Words such as Tupã (meaning "God") and Jerupari (meaning "devil") facilitated communication but also distorted concepts. According to Agnolin (2006), this translation was not innocent; it reinterpreted Tupinambá cosmology through a Christian lens, eliminating nuances and imposing a Manichaean dichotomy of "good" versus "evil" that did not previously exist.

Above all, the Capuchin mission in Maranhão was a project of domination, strengthened by education. Its methods, the persuasion of leaders, and symbolic control reveal a sophisticated social engineering, designed to subject the Tupinambás to French power.

Nevertheless, the indigenous people did not surrender without a fight. Whether by accepting baptism only on paper or by fleeing to the forest, they negotiated, adapted, and, often, sabotaged the colonial project. This story is about more than imposition; it is about a clash of worlds where education, religion, and power intertwine.

Today, as we reflect on the past, we acknowledge that education is never neutral; it can be an instrument of both liberation and oppression. The Tupinambás, with their subtle yet steadfast resistance, demonstrate that even in the most unequal relationships, the ability to act and resist never completely disappears.

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