

Dynamics of the Abipones in the boundaries of the Chaco in the XVIII century

Dinâmicas abipones nas fronteiras do Chaco no século XVIII

Abipones en las fronteras del Chaco en el siglo XVIII

Dynamyques abipones dans les frontières du Chaco au XVIIIe siècle

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LUCAIOLI, Carina P. *Abipones en las fronteras del Chaco. Una etnografía histórica sobre el siglo XVIII*. Buenos Aires: Sociedad Argentina de Antropología, 2011. 352 p.

In the past few decades, publications of historians, ethnohistorians and anthropologists brought new light into the boundaries of South America.¹ Overcoming the dichotomies resistance and acculturation as well as winners and losers, recent studies have focused on the multi-ethnic features of territories that were originally indigenous. By being imprecise, flexible and porous, these territories are seen as “contact zones”, “socially built spaces”. In these locations, native peoples have established internal and interethnic strategies, relations and negotiations with adventitious and different indigenous groups during the conquest process.

To this line of studies is added the book by the assistant professor of the Department of Anthropological Sciences of *Facultad de Filosofía y Letras* at *Universidad de Buenos Aires* (FFyL-UBA), Carina P. Lucaioli, entitled “*Abipones en las fronteras del Chaco. Una etnografía histórica sobre el siglo XVIII*”. It was a result of her doctoral thesis, guided by the professor doctor Lúcia Nacuzzi, published by *Sociedad Argentina de Antropología*, in 2011.

After reading many documents, manuscripts and publications (minutes, correspondences of religious and governors, notes, among others) in the archives of Argentina, Chile, Rio de Janeiro, Paraguay and Seville, the author conducted a vigorous ethnohistorical study about the *abipones*. This is a nomadic

¹Nádia Farage, *As Muralhas do Sertão: os povos Indígenas no Rio Branco e a Colonização*, Rio de Janeiro, Paz e Terra/Anpocs, 1991; Lúcia Nacuzzi, *Identidades impuestas*, Buenos Aires, Sociedad Argentina de Antropología, 1998; Guillaume Boccard, *Los vencedores: los mapuche en la época colonial*, Santiago de Chile, Instituto de Investigaciones Arqueológicas y Museo, 2007; Sílvia Ortelli; Glória Kok, *O Sertão Itinerante: expedições da Capitania de São Paulo no século XVIII*, São Paulo, Hucitec/Fapesp, 2004; Elisa F. Garcia, *As diversas formas de ser índio*, Rio de Janeiro, Arquivo Nacional de Pesquisa, 2007; Maria Regina Celestino Almeida; Sara Ortelli, “Atravesando fronteras. Circulación de población en los márgenes iberoamericanos. Siglos XVI-XIX (primera y segunda parte)”, *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*, Debates 2011, 2012, Disponível em: <<http://nuevomundo.revues.org/62628>>, Acesso em: 07 de fevereiro de 2013.

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group of hunters and collectors of the linguistic family Guaycurúque, resident of the Chaco region, in Argentina. Aiming to reveal the actions and the political interactions between natives and colonial agents, the author divided the book in four chapters, enlightening the dynamics of boundaries and the network of the Chaco in the XVIII century.

Chapter 1, "*Los abipones en el Chaco austral: representaciones, recursos y usos del espacio*";² brings a rich analysis of the indigenous populations that lived in the Chaco, among which were the *abipones*, the adaptation strategies and the uses of territory by colonizers and natives, besides the construction of different types of imagination and speeches elaborated around the Chaco space.

La construcción del Chaco como espacio ajeno al dominio colonial, tierra de indígenas no dominados, se desarrolló de manera simultánea al proceso de configuración y consolidación de sus distintos espacios fronterizos: la frontera occidental en la jurisdicción del Tucumán, la frontera del Paraguay y la frontera santafesina (p. 21).³

Due to the richness of resources, geographic aspects and its inhabitants, the Chaco became "una pieza clave en el mantenimiento de la autonomía indígena, desde donde los grupos podían ofrecer resistencia al avance colonial" (p. 65).⁴ Organized in "*cacicados*", which were also divided into "partialities" (*riikahé, nakaigetergehé e yaaukanigá*) based on moveable family groups formed by blood relation and marriage, in the mid 18th century *abipones* faced the frontier policies of 1751, which aimed at "sedentarizing" and "civilizing"; or, as stated in the document, "conquistar infieles, descubrir sus tierras, fundarles pueblo, mantenerlos en él" (p. 75).⁵

In response, the *abipones*, then confederate to other groups, such as *calchaquíes* and *mocovies*, who were then solitary, went into wars, robberies and *malocas* (surprise attacks with European spoils) in cities, farms and frontier cities. "Las alianzas interétnicas eran tan móviles como lo era la posibilidad de renovar las alianzas políticas y sociales de carácter segmentario" (p. 81),⁶ as explained by the author. However, the *abipones* did not use only violence in their border relations. They were also the main responsible for agreements that enabled peaceful moments in which the exchange of commercial incorporated goods from the Europeans was intensified — horses, cattle, slaves, silver and golden coins, clothes —, as well as the provision of services and circulation of people in the borders.

Chapter 2, "*Las reducciones jesuítas de abipones: estrategias, interacción e intercámbios*"⁷ focused on the different negotiation processes that gave place to the foundation of the reduction of *abipones* in the region of the Chaco, thus

²Abipones in the austral Chaco: representations, resources and uses of space".

³The construction of the Chaco as an external space for the colonial domain, land of non-dominated indigenous peoples, developed simultaneously to the process of configuration and consolidation of its different frontiers: the western frontier in the jurisdiction of Tucumán, the frontier of Paraguay and the frontier of Santafesina" (p. 21).

⁴"a key piece to maintain the autonomy of indigenous people, from where the groups might offer resistance to colonial advances" (p. 65).

⁵at conquering infidels, discovering their lands, finding their people and keeping them there" (p. 75).

⁶Interethnic alliances were as moveable as the possibility to renew segmentary political and social alliances" (p. 81).

⁷The jesuit reductions of abipones: strategies, interaction and exchange".

starting a new phase of interethnic relations. Each reduction had its own history, led by chiefs, and formed an isolated territory that generated new interaction with distinct colonial and indigenous sectors. As pointed out by Carina Lucaioli:

Portales entre un mundo colonial y un espacio indígena, sitios mestizos casi por definición, propiciaron la circulación y el intercambio de bienes, personas y ideas. Así planteadas las cosas, las reducciones generaron nuevas posibilidades sociales, económicas y políticas que los abipones supieron amoldar a sus propios intereses en complejos procesos de ‘aculturación antagónica’ (p. 96).⁸

When San Javier was founded, in 1743, the first mission of the *mocovíes* in the austral chaco, the pacts and deals began before the XVIII century between different actors and colonial sectors. As observed by the author, it is not only about thinking of policies imposed to the defeated groups.

Las reducciones brindaron, a muchos abipones, mayores posibilidades para el acceso a determinados recursos y permitieron otras actividades económicas — sobre todo, las relacionadas con el ganado vacuno —, así como instauraron nuevas vías de interacción más estrechas y asiduas con las ciudades coloniales” (p. 105).⁹

The abipones did not use only violence in their border relations. They were also the main responsible for agreements that enabled peaceful moments

The Indians were in charge of choosing the location for the missions, and they opted for sites further from Spanish peoples, guarded by rivers, protected from possible military incursions, punitive expeditions and other indigenous groups. Therefore, in the history of *abipones*, the choice of location was crucial to maintain both the mobility and the autonomy of the population of the missions.

Chapter 3, “*El liderazgo indígena: formas de autoridad*”,¹⁰ dealt with the history of the chiefs, chosen both for hereditary right and for warrior merit, unraveling their political strategies in the borders, mostly ambiguous, as well as the learning of languages and forms of Spanish diplomacy, positioning them both as friends and enemies of the Spanish. For native peoples, according to the author the missions were “espacios de centralización y distribución

⁸Portals between a colonial world and an indigenous space, mixed places almost by definition, provided the circulation and the exchange of goods, people and ideas. Therefore, the reductions generated new social, economic and political possibilities, which the abipones knew how to adjust to their own interest in complex processes of “antagonistic acculturation” (p. 96).

⁹The reductions provided many abipones with greater possibilities to access specific resources and also enabled other economic activities - especially those related to cattle -, and also established new ways for a closer and more frequent interaction with colonial cities” (p.105).

¹⁰The Indian leadership: forms of authority

e intercambio de determinados recursos económicos que los jesuitas y funcionarios coloniales otorgaban a los indios reducidos” (p. 209).¹¹

In the final chapter,¹² “*Relaciones interétnicas al calor de las armas: amigos, enemigos, aliados y cautivos*”, Carina Lucaioli tells the story of contact between *abipones* and iberoamericans from the dynamics of violence. Results of that were the colonial war, indigenous war and *malocas*. According to the author, violence was the main resource used by the *abipones* in the colonial period, which ran by parallel or overlapping paths, since many agreements resulted in armed conflicts.

Clever to understand the gear of dynamics and merchandise nets of the *abipones* under the perspective of forms of interaction with the colonial society in border spaces of the Chaco in the XVIII century, Carina Lucaioli provides us with a reference publication for studies on indigenous history, historic ethnography and anthropology and also the colonial history of the low lands of South America. She was efficient at breaking solid ideas, and also emphasized the mobility, the forged collective identities and — among forms of violence, pacts, negotiations and deals — the construction of the direction of the *abipones* history in the creation of the colonial world between the lines of documents.

¹¹“spaces of centralization and distribution and also exchange of specific economic resources that Jesuits and colonial workers donated to reduced Indians” (p. 209).

¹²“Interethnic relations in the heat of guns: friends, enemies, allies and slaves”