

Multi and transculturality between Jesuits and native peoples during the Argentine colonial era

Luciana Acosta Güemes 1✉; Cemic University Institute, Argentina.

María Inés Calzetta 2; Cemic University Institute, Argentina.

Carolina Giménez Milán 3; Institute of Letters “Eduardo Mallea”, Argentina.

Abstract: The development of this work aims to identify the type of cultural relationship between Jesuits and native settlers during the colonial era in the Argentine national territory, the latter defined by the period in which there was socioeconomic and political control by the Spanish crown; until national independence in 1816. To do this, we will begin by contextualizing the definitions of culture, interculturality, multiculturalism and transculturality, to identify what type of cultural relationships took place between the actors in said historical context. Starting from the basic assumption that there was no true intercultural transfer given the subordination of the native peoples, the existence of processes of multiculturalism and interculturality will nevertheless be postulated. Next, the origin and development of Jesuit action within the Argentine national territory during the colonial era will be addressed, with special emphasis on its educational characteristics as an argument for the existence of multiculturalism. Finally, an example of interculturality represented by the knowledge of the native peoples will be developed regarding the use of healing plants in the Jesuit pharmacopoeia, once used by these peoples.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, argentine history, Jesuits, native peoples

✉ luacostaguemes@yahoo.com

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INTRODUCTION

Culture, interculturality, multiculturalism and transculturality in the colonial historical scenario

According to Taylor (1977), culture is the complex that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morality, law, custom and other habits and abilities acquired by man as a member of a society. That is, it is a learned, shared, symbolic and integrated phenomenon within a society (Kottak, 1977).

In turn, as established by Hernández (2005), the term interculturality refers to the relationship and exchange between cultures and, therefore, to the mutual enrichment between them. However, for a process of intercultural transfer to be confirmed, there must be recognition and appreciation of each of the cultures towards the other within a framework of equality. Cultural, legislative and language differences can present difficulties for the intercultural transfer of knowledge, understood as knowledge within a symmetrical social bond that must be transmitted by the sender and absorbed by the receiver, to comply with the transfer action. (Henriques, 2016). In the case under study, it is difficult to argue in favor of a true intercultural transfer, due to the already proven power relationship in favor of the Jesuits towards the original peoples within the colonial social order through various examples, among them, the original language subordinated to religion (Kwiecien, 2008), paternal defense and Jesuit evangelization (Giuliano, 2019), and a European architectural hegemony in the reductions (Rocchietti and Poujade, 2013).

However, it can be established that the term "multiculturalism" refers exclusively to the juxtaposition of the different cultures existing in the same physical space, without necessarily implying an exchange between them. In this scenario there are examples (I do not know if it will be necessary to mention an

example) of cultures that coexist in the same space, under a symmetrical or asymmetrical power relationship, and with the possibility of cultural exchange.

Therefore, if multiculturalism implies a diversity of cultures, and interculturality implies an exchange in terms of equality, transculturality entails a process by which cultures manifest themselves as a third space that converges in a new identity from these loans and exchanges (Zebadúa Carbonell, 2011).

Therefore, framing from a semantic level what happened between both cultures is a task not free of difficulties. A process of intercultural transfer did not take place, although it could be said that phenomena of multiculturalism did take place, represented by a bicultural encounter in which the Jesuit educational doctrine decisively influenced the original peoples; and transculturality, embodied by the appearance of various Jesuit botanical treatises on herbs used for medical purposes by native peoples. Next, both examples will be deepened, to argue the basic assumption of the existence of multiculturalism and transculturality during the Argentine colonial era.

MULTICULTURALISM: JESUIT EDUCATIONAL DOCTRINE

The Society of Jesus was founded by the Spaniard Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) on August 15, 1534, and was approved by Pope Paul III in 1540. They reached the American continent in 1540 and, later, the Argentine terrain through their arrival in Tucumán in 1585; and were expelled from their colonies by King Charles III (1716-1788) in 1767 (O'Malley, 2014).

The history of his educational work began as soon as the order was founded, when Ignatius of Loyola summoned recognized university students to promote education, considered from its beginnings as its

main apostolate. In 1548 a college was founded in Messina (Sicily), and within half a century, several hundred Jesuit colleges had been established throughout Europe, as well as in Lima, Mexico City and Manila (Neenan, 1999). In addition, many young people with incomplete scholastic studies¹ wanted to join the new order, who were educated in a "Collegium seminarium", an ecclesiastical residence. Finally, Jesuit education evolved into an open educational system for people outside the order (McGucken, 2008).

The bull of Pope Alexander VI in 1493 legitimized the Spanish expansion in America, making the conversion of the native peoples a justifying reason for the conquest. Thus, the educational work by religious companies in American territory had as its objective the propagation of the Catholic faith as a political-religious unifying factor.

In its beginnings, education pursued a triple objective: 1) convert the original peoples to Christianity; (2) incorporating them into European culture; 3°) use them in production.

Then, because on the one hand the Catholic Church conferred legitimacy on the Spanish monarchy, and on the other hand the colonizing expeditions were justified under a religious framework, during the time of the Austrias (1516-1700) the development of education in the American territory was promoted, whose main objective was the dissemination of the Catholic religion (Solari, 1972).

The House of the Austrias (1516-1700), through the reign of Philip II (1527-1598), promoted a colonial policy of religious unity, thus avoiding any attempt at renewal promoted by the growing modern thought and scientific renaissance of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The secular arm supported the Church so that it could fulfill its evangelizing mission but, in turn, the Church supported the monarch as protector of the faith, thus establishing a relationship of mutual dependence.

From here the Jesuit protagonism came into play, since they dedicated themselves to introducing the Catholic religion and European culture under a system of free and group education among children belonging to native peoples. From the beginning they established Jesuit missions (Image 1), defined by the existence of cattle and books, to promote peaceful colonization. Its objective was to educate the native peoples within the Catholic faith and away from the conflicts generated by the political interests of the colonizers.



Image 1: Jesuit reduction of San Ignacio Miní, in the province of Misiones, Argentina, founded in the early seventeenth century. Wikimedia Commons.

Thus, during the Argentine colonial era, education was influenced by two currents (Gutiérrez, 2022):

- The Northern Current, originating in Peru. It belonged to the time of the Austrias, promoted the development of the cities of Santiago del Estero, Tucumán and Córdoba, and was regulated by religious orders, with the prominence of the Society of Jesus (Solari, 1972). During the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was the one that prevailed, with its epicenter in the city of Córdoba, where a confessional and theological legacy was developed.

- The silver stream, which was, on the contrary, regulated by civil officials. It was a consequence of the renewal movement of the Bourbon era (1700-present). With the creation of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata (1776), this current had its epicenter in the city of Buenos Aires.

The greatest legacy of the Jesuit educational doctrine can be evidenced in the beginnings of Argentine national higher education in 1613, when the Diocese of Córdoba, through Bishop Fray Hernando de Trejo y Sanabria, began to teach courses in Latin, arts and theology taught by the Jesuits in the “Colegio Máximo” in the province of Cordoba (Image 2) established by Father Diego de Torres, provincial of the Society of Jesus. The bull signed by Pope Gregory XV dated August 8, 1621, and later ratified by King Philip IV with the Royal Decree of February 2, 1622, authorized the “Colegio Máximo” to grant philosophical and theological academic degrees (Piana and Sartori, 2012).

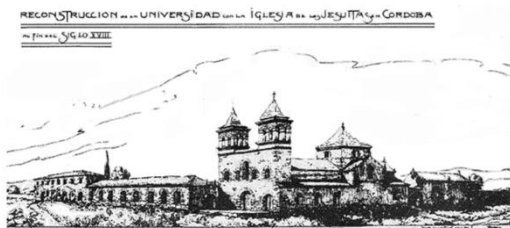


Image 2: Reconstruction of the university with the church of the Jesuits in Córdoba, Argentina, at the end of the eighteenth century, year 1916.

Wikimedia Commons

In the “Colegio Máximo” (today University of Córdoba) the governance was independent of the civil authorities and the appointment of officials depended on the Provincial of the Jesuits. The Faculty of Arts encompassed the study of philosophy (Logic, Physics and Metaphysics, according to Aristotle) and required three years of study and two of internship. The Faculty of Theology, the only one that could grant the title of doctor, developed its studies of canons,

morals and theology in four years and two years of internship, teaching based on the *Summa Theologica*² of St. Thomas Aquinas and the *Liber sententiarum*³ of Peter Lombard, classic texts of theological teaching.

The teaching was scholastic and intended to form members of the clergy, who represented the intellectual stratum of society. After the Jesuit expulsion from the national territory in 1767, the “Colegio Máximo” was secularized and renamed the “Royal University of San Carlos and Nuestra Señora de Montserrat”. When Fray José Antonio de San Alberto arrived in Córdoba in 1780, he found the diocese in a lamentable state of backwardness and abandonment, hence in his first Pastoral Letter, dated April 25, 1781, he tended to awaken in priests the interest in instructing themselves, since holiness was not enough for ecclesiastical exercise; Doctrine and science were also indispensable: “What do we get out of it,” he said, “by the ordained being a saint, if he is ignorant? This saint will be very good for any other secular state or employment; but not for priest” (Solari, 1972).

Likewise, among the main Jesuit educational characteristics can be highlighted (Schwickerath, 2011): its humanistic objectives, the *Cura personalis* through a practice of the spiritual exercises; The *Ratio Studiorum* (Image 3), which acted as a pedagogical tool that systematized the educational methodology (Hughes, 1892 and Duminuco, 2020); the promotion of self-learning tools within students; and the incentive of physical activities (*mens sana in corpore sano*)⁴.

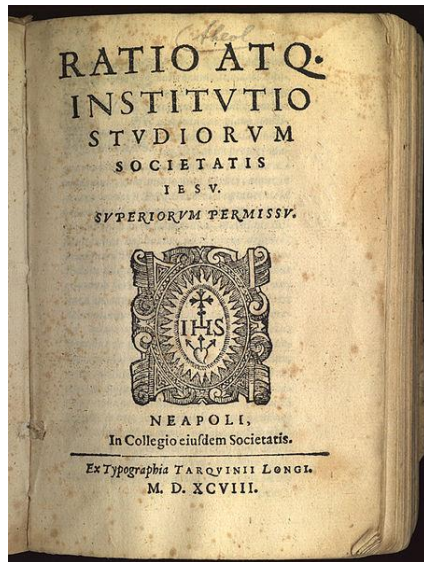


Image 3: Ratio Studiorum, year 1598. Wikimedia Commons.

Thus, three Jesuit historical-educational epochs can be established according to Neenan (1999):

- The Age of Discovery (1548-1763), with an interest in languages, history, literature, and science.

- The restoration of the Society of Jesus (1814-1960), marked by a re-establishment of Jesuit schools as cultural centers of their communities.

- The era of globalization (after 1960), through a promotion of social justice, working with refugees, unemployed and homeless people. The Jesuits believed that education promoted citizens with moral qualities and endowed with sound judgment. In addition, they claimed that education could improve the social status of the disadvantaged.

Finally, from the eighteenth century began to develop liberal ideology in France which, in turn, influenced Spanish thought. This generated the idea that the State oversaw educating the entire population, causing a consequent secularization of it. In this historical context, two currents emerged in French thought—encyclopedia and physiocracy—which advocated

liberalism in philosophy, religion, politics, and economics; upholding the State's obligation to educate the people and the secularization of education (Argibay et al, 1997).

Under these ideas is that arose in Spain an interest referred to public instruction during the reign of Carlos III, part of the House of Bourbons (1700-present), which facilitated the creation of new educational establishments. Under his reign it was decided the expulsion of the Jesuits from the territories under Spanish rule.

TRANSCULTURALITY: KNOWLEDGE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN JESUIT HERBAL MEDICINE

According to Eliseo Cantón (1921), the Jesuits wrote small treatises on medicinal plants, many of which were already used by native peoples. In his chapter "The Religious Physicians and Herbalists of the Jesuits (1700 to 1750)", he states that, in times when knowledge was in the hands of the clergy, several priests were allowed to study and practice medicine and surgery.

The lack of doctors and medicines influenced the promotion of the study of herbs with healing properties, according to the attribution of such characteristics by native peoples.

According to de Asúa (2016), the scientific activity of the Jesuits included disciplines such as Astronomy, Natural History, Medical Botany, Cartography and Experimental Physics. In this sense, in Medical Botany an exchange between hegemonic Western knowledge and the medicine of native peoples is clear, where the former reformulates original knowledge in a Western key.

The cases of the Jesuits Buenaventura Suarez, Pedro Montenegro and Segismundo Asperger

The Santa Fe Jesuit Buenaventura Suarez (1679-1749) wrote a treatise on roots, plants, and medicinal trees, called

"Historical-alphabetical-medical index of the roots, plants and trees found in these provinces" (Marzocca, 2001). He studied at the University of Córdoba and was one of the precursors of astronomical studies in the Río de la Plata (Image 4) and, in addition to developing a work as a naturalist classifying the various regional species, he was the first Creole scientist who published scientific articles in a specialized journal (Philosophical Transactions) between 1748 and 1749 (Galindo, 2011).

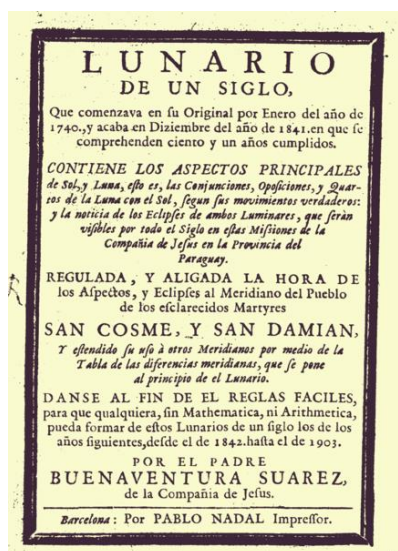


Image 4: Lunario of a century, published in 1752, where it describes the exact date of eclipses sighted from missionary land, in Argentina (1740 to 1841). Wikimedia Commons.

According to Cantón (1921), the Spanish Jesuit Pedro Montenegro (1663-1728), doctor of the Guarani, finished writing in Paraguay the "Materia medica misionera" (Image 5) in 1710 (Scarpa, 2019), underlining the virtues of yerba mate, among other herbs. It is a treatise on medicinal plants in South American countries, the result of his tour of Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay. In it, the drawing of each tree or plant bears its name in Guarani and Spanish; such as the descriptions of Palo Santo or Ibirá ucai and Algarrobillo Guayacán or Ibirá ché for lung conditions, and Yerba de la víbora or Mboya caá for snake bites.

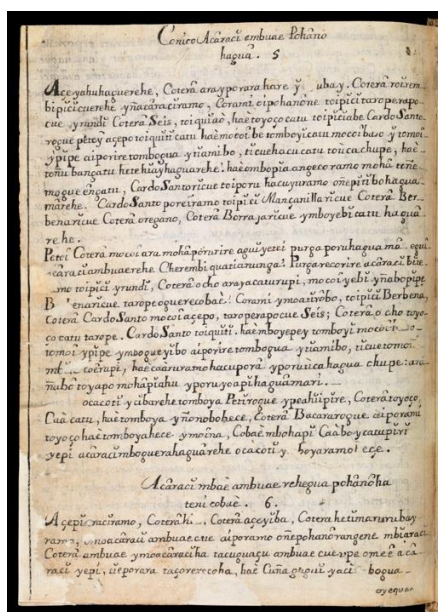


Image 5: Materia Medica Misionera, 1725. Wikimedia Commons

On the other hand, the missionary herbalist written by the Austrian Jesuit Segismundo Asperger (1687-1772), published in Italy in 1752, had great acceptance in Paraguay and in the Argentine province of Misiones, although he extracted much of his knowledge from the "Materia medica" of Pedro Montenegro. According to a letter from Father Batschon dated 1719 expounding Canton (1921):

Father Segismundo Asperger, with the remedies brought from Europe and part with the medicinal herbs of the country, whose virtues and properties he knew very well, in Córdoba del Tucumán, had freed a large number of people from death, so that the Bishop and the whole city did not tire of exalting and honoring him and did not want to let him leave.

On the other hand, the French naturalist Martín de Moussy (1860), author of the book "Geographical and statistical description of the Argentine Confederation", wrote:

The territory of Misiones and the province of Corrientes are above all rich in medicinal plants of all kinds, and about which the Jesuit Asperger had written, in the middle of the last century, a work of which some manuscript copies remain... among many wrong or erroneous properties that he attributes to the plants that the Guarani of the Missions presented or indicated to him, there are nevertheless many very real, and that could render true services in the art of healing.

CONCLUSIONS

Considering that culture implies a system of knowledge and customs that characterizes a population and is transmitted generationally, it can be confirmed that, indeed, there was a process of multi and transculturality between the actors of the Jesuit order and the inhabitants of native peoples within the Argentine national territory, between the years 1585 (when they arrived in the territory) and 1767.

During these 182 years, a complex cultural interaction took place that, without inquiring in this work about the Jesuit colonizing action to the detriment of the culture of native peoples, directly and indirectly nourished both groups with knowledge.

Currently, this coexistence is embodied in two concrete examples: on the one hand, under a Jesuit educational legacy within the national education system and, on the other hand, through the validation of native medicinal herbs (phytomedicine) by organizations such as the Pan American Health Organization⁵ (PAHO) or the World Health Organization⁶ (WHO).

In this sense, both examples of multi and transculturality occurred during the

colonial era survive today amalgamated in the Argentine national culture.

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Footnotes

1. Scholasticism is a theological and philosophical current of European origin initiated in the NINTH CENTURY, which brings together Greco-Latin and Christian knowledge, to subordinate reason to faith.
2. Unfinished treatise on theology written by the philosopher, scholastic theologian and doctor of the Church St. Thomas Aquinas, between the years 1265 and 1274.
3. Treatise on theology written by the philosopher, scholastic theologian and bishop Peter Lombard during the TWELFTH century.
4. Phrase of Latin origin originated by the Roman writer Decimus Junius Juvenal between the FIRST and SECOND centuries, which means "a healthy mind in a healthy body".
5. PAHO Working Group on Medicinal Plants
https://www3.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1587:2009-grupo-trabajo-plantas-

[medicinales&Itemid=0&lang=es#gsc.tab=0](#)

6. WHO Strategy on Traditional
Medicine 2014-2023

[https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/95008/9789243506098_spa.pdf](#)